

C A R A V A N

By

JOHN GALSWORTHY

VOLUME II

THE APPLE TREE



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CONTENTS

	PAGE
THE APPLE TREE	3
THE PRISONER	73
A SIMPLE TALE	80
THE CONSUMMATION	91
ACME	98
DEFEAT	107
VIRTUE	125
THE NEIGHBOURS	135
STROKE OF LIGHTNING	142
SPINDLEBERRIES	157
SALTA PRO NOBIS	170
THE PACK	176
"THE DOG IT WAS THAT DIED"	182
A KNIGHT	198
THE JURYMAN	240
TIMBER	265
SANTA LUCIA	277
THE MOTHER STONE	293
PEACE MEETING	298
A STRANGE THING	306

CARAVAN
VOLUME II
—
THE APPLE TREE

THE APPLE-TREE

"The Apple-tree, the singing, and the gold."

MURRAY'S *Hippolytus* of Euripides.

ON their silver-wedding day Ashurst and his wife were motoring along the outskirts of the moor, intending to crown the festival by stopping the night at Torquay, where they had first met. This was the idea of Stella Ashurst, whose character contained a streak of sentiment. If she had long lost the blue-eyed, flower-like charm, the cool slim purity of face and form, the apple-blossom colouring, which had so swiftly and so oddly affected Ashurst twenty-six years ago, she was still at forty-three a comely and faithful companion, whose cheeks were faintly mottled, and whose grey-blue eyes had acquired a certain fullness.

It was she who had stopped the car where the common rose steeply to the left, and a narrow strip of larch and beech, with here and there a pine, stretched out towards the valley between the road and the first long high hill of the full moor. She was looking for a place where they might lunch, for Ashurst never looked for anything; and this, between the golden furze and the feathery green larches smelling of lemons in the last sun of April—this, with a view into the deep valley and up to the long moor heights, seemed fitting to the decisive nature of one who sketched in water-colours, and loved romantic spots. Grasping her paint box she got out.

"Won't this do, Frank?"

Ashurst, rather like a bearded Schiller, grey in the wings, tall, long-legged, with large remote grey eyes which sometimes filled with meaning and became almost beautiful, with nose a little to one side, and bearded lips just open—Ashurst, forty-eight, and silent, grasped the luncheon basket, and got out too.

"Oh! Look, Frank! A grave!"

By the side of the road, where the track from the top of the common crossed it at right angles and ran through a gate past the narrow wood, was a thin mound of turf, six feet by one, with a moorstone to the west, and on it someone had thrown a blackthorn spray and a handful of bluebells. Ashurst looked, and the poet in him moved. At cross-roads a suicide's grave! Poor mortals with their superstitions! Whoever lay there, though, had the best of it, no clammy sepulchre among other hideous graves carved with futilities—just a rough stone, the wide sky, and wayside blessings! And, without comment, for he had learned not to be a philosopher in the bosom of his family, he strode away up on to the common, dropped the luncheon basket under a wall, spread a rug for his wife to sit on—she would turn up from her sketching when she was hungry—and took from his pocket Murray's translation of the "Hippolytus." He had soon finished reading of "The Cyprian" and her revenge, and looked at the sky instead. And watching the white clouds so bright against the intense blue, Ashurst, on his silver-wedding day, longed for—he knew not what. Mal-adjusted to life—man's organism! One's mode of life might be high and scrupulous, but there was always an undercurrent of greediness, a hankering, and sense of waste. Did women have it

too? Who could tell? And yet, men who gave vent to their appetites for novelty, their riotous longings for new adventures, new risks, new pleasures, these suffered, no doubt, from the reverse side of starvation, from surfeit. No getting out of it—a mal-adjusted animal, civilised man! There could be no garden of his choosing, of “the Apple-tree, the singing, and the gold,” in the words of that lovely Greek chorus, no achievable elysium in life, or lasting haven of happiness for any man with a sense of beauty—nothing which could compare with the captured loveliness in a work of art set down for ever, so that to look on it or read was always to have the same precious sense of exaltation and restful inebriety. Life no doubt had moments with that quality of beauty, of unbidden flying rapture, but the trouble was, they lasted no longer than the span of a cloud’s flight over the sun; impossible to keep them with you, as Art caught beauty and held it fast. They were fleeting as one of the glimmering or golden visions one had of the soul in nature, glimpses of its remote and brooding spirit. Here, with the sun hot on his face, a cuckoo calling from a thorn tree, and in the air the honey savour of gorse—here among the little fronds of the young fern, the starry blackthorn, while the bright clouds drifted by high above the hills and dreamy valleys—here and now was such a glimpse. But in a moment it would pass—as the face of Pan, which looks round the corner of a rock, vanishes at your stare. And suddenly he sat up. Surely there was something familiar about this view, this bit of common, that ribbon of road, the old wall behind him. While they were driving he had not been taking notice—never did; thinking of far things or of nothing—but now he saw! Twenty-six years ago, just at this time of year,

from the farmhouse within half a mile of this very spot he had started for that day in Torquay whence it might be said he had never returned. And a sudden ache beset his heart; he had stumbled on just one of those past moments in his life, whose beauty and rapture he had failed to arrest, whose wings had fluttered away into the unknown; he had stumbled on a buried memory, a wild sweet time, swiftly choked and ended. And, turning on his face, he rested his chin on his hands, and stared at the short grass where the little blue milk-wort was growing. . . .

And this is what he remembered.

I §

On the first of May, after their last year together at college, Frank Ashurst and his friend Robert Garton were on a tramp. They had walked that day from Brent, intending to make Chagford, but Ashurst's football knee had given out, and according to their map they had still some seven miles to go. They were sitting on a bank beside the road, where a track crossed alongside a wood, resting the knee and talking of the universe, as young men will. Both were over six feet, and thin as rails; Ashurst pale, idealistic, full of absence; Garton queer, round-the-corner, knotted, curly, like some primeval beast. Both had a literary bent; neither wore a hat. Ashurst's hair was smooth, pale, wavy, and had a way of rising on either side of his brow, as if always being flung back; Garton's was a kind of dark unfathomed mop. They had not met a soul for miles.

"My dear fellow," Garton was saying, "pity's only an effect of self-consciousness; it's a disease of the last five thousand years. The world was happier without."

Ashurst, following the clouds with his eyes, answered :

"It's the pearl in the oyster, anyway."

"My dear chap, all our modern unhappiness comes from pity. Look at animals, and Red Indians, limited to feeling their own occasional misfortunes ; then look at ourselves—never free from feeling the toothaches of others. Let's get back to feeling for nobody, and have a better time."

"You'll never practise that."

Garton pensively stirred the hotch-potch of his hair.

"To attain full growth, one mustn't be squeamish. To starve oneself emotionally's a mistake. All emotion is to the good—enriches life."

"Yes, and when it runs up against chivalry ?"

"Ah ! That's so English ! If you speak of emotion the English always think you want something physical, and are shocked. They're afraid of passion, but not of lust—oh, no !—so long as they can keep it secret."

Ashurst did not answer ; he had plucked a blue floweret, and was twiddling it against the sky. A cuckoo began calling from a thorn tree. The sky, the flowers, the songs of birds ! Robert was talking through his hat ! And he said :

"Well, let's go on, and find some farm where we can put up." In uttering those words, he was conscious of a girl coming down from the common just above them. She was outlined against the sky, carrying a basket, and you could see that sky through the crook of her arm. And Ashurst, who saw beauty without wondering how it could advantage him, thought : 'How pretty !' The wind, blowing her dark frieze skirt against her legs, lifted her battered peacock tam-o'-shanter ; her greyish blouse was worn

and old, her shoes were split, her little hands rough and red, her neck browned. Her dark hair waved untidy across her broad forehead, her face was short, her upper lip short, showing a glint of teeth, her brows were straight and dark, her lashes long and dark, her nose straight; but her grey eyes were the wonder—dewy as if opened for the first time that day. She looked at Ashurst—perhaps he struck her as strange, limping along without a hat, with his large eyes on her, and his hair flung back. He could not take off what was not on his head, but put up his hand in a salute, and said:

“Can you tell us if there’s a farm near here where we could stay the night? I’ve gone lame.”

“There’s only our farm near, sir.” She spoke without shyness, in a pretty, soft, crisp voice.

“And where is that?”

“Down here, sir.”

“Would you put us up?”

“Oh! I think we would.”

“Will you show us the way?”

“Yes, sir.”

He limped on, silent, and Garton took up the catechism.

“Are you a Devonshire girl?”

“No, sir.”

“What then?”

“From Wales.”

“Ah! I *thought* you were a Celt; so it’s not your farm?”

“My aunt’s, sir.”

“And your uncle’s?”

“He is dead.”

“Who farms it, then?”

“My aunt, and my three cousins.”

"But your uncle was a Devonshire man?"

"Yes, sir."

"Have you lived here long?"

"Seven years."

"And how d'you like it after Wales?"

"I don't know, sir."

"I suppose you don't remember?"

"Oh, yes! But it is different."

"I believe you!"

Ashurst broke in suddenly:

"How old are you?"

"Seventeen, sir."

"And what's your name?"

"Megan David."

"This is Robert Garton, and I am Frank Ashurst. We wanted to get on to Chagford."

"It is a pity your leg is hurting you."

Ashurst smiled, and when he smiled his face was rather beautiful.

Descending past the narrow wood, they came on the farm suddenly—a long, low, stone-built dwelling with casement windows, in a farmyard where pigs and fowls and an old mare were straying. A short steep-up grass hill behind was crowned with a few Scotch firs, and in front, an old orchard of apple-trees, just breaking into flower, stretched down to a stream and a long wild meadow. A little boy with oblique dark eyes was shepherding a pig, and by the house door stood a woman, who came towards them. The girl said:

"It is Mrs. Narracombe, my aunt."

"Mrs. Narracombe, my aunt," had a quick, dark eye, like a mother wild-duck's, and something of the same snaky turn about her neck.

"We met your niece on the road," said Ashurst;

"she thought you might perhaps put us up for the night."

Mrs. Narracombe, taking them in from head to heel, answered :

"Well, I can, if you don't mind one room. Megan, get the spare room ready, and a bowl of cream. You'll be wanting tea, I suppose."

Passing through a sort of porch made by two yew trees and some flowering-currant bushes, the girl disappeared into the house, her peacock tam-o'-shanter bright athwart that rosy-pink and the dark green of the yews.

"Will you come into the parlour and rest your leg? You'll be from college, perhaps?"

"We were, but we've gone down now."

Mrs. Narracombe nodded sagely.

The parlour, brick-floored, with bare table and shiny chairs and sofa stuffed with horsehair, seemed never to have been used, it was so terribly clean. Ashurst sat down at once on the sofa, holding his lame knee between his hand, and Mrs. Narracombe gazed at him. He was the only son of a late professor of chemistry, but people found a certain lordliness in one who was often so sublimely unconscious of them.

"Is there a stream where we could bathe?"

"There's the strame at the bottom of the orchard, but sittin' down you'll not be covered!"

"How deep?"

"Well, 'tis about a foot and a half, maybe."

"Oh! That'll do fine. Which way?"

"Down the lane, through the second gate on the right, an' the pool's by the the big apple-tree that stands by itself. There's trout there, if you can tickle them."

"They're more likely to tickle us!"

Mrs. Narracombe smiled. "There'll be the tea ready when you come back."

The pool, formed by the damming of a rock, had a sandy bottom; and the big apple-tree, lowest in the orchard, grew so close that its boughs almost overhung the water; it was in leaf, and all but in flower—its crimson buds just bursting. There was not room for more than one at a time in that narrow bath, and Ashurst waited his turn, rubbing his knee and gazing at the wild meadow, all rocks and thorn trees and field flowers, with a grove of beeches beyond, raised up on a flat mound. Every bough was swinging in the wind, every spring bird calling, and a slanting sunlight dappled the grass. He thought of Theocritus, and the river Cherwell, of the moon, and the maiden with the dewy eyes; of so many things that he seemed to think of nothing; and he felt absurdly happy.

2 §

During a late and sumptuous tea with eggs to it, cream and jam, and thin, fresh cakes touched with saffron, Garton descanted on the Celts. It was about the period of the Celtic awakening, and the discovery that there was Celtic blood about this family had excited one who believed that he was a Celt himself. Sprawling on a horsehair chair, with a hand-made cigarette dribbling from the corner of his curly lips, he had been plunging his cold pin-points of eyes into Ashurst's and praising the refinement of the Welsh. To come out of Wales into England was like the change from china to earthenware! Frank, as a d——d Englishman, had not of course perceived the exquisite refinement and emotional capacity of that Welsh girl! And, delicately

stirring in the dark mat of his still wet hair, he explained how exactly she illustrated the writings of the Welsh bard Morgan-ap-Something in the twelfth century.

Ashurst, full length on the horsehair sofa, and jutting far beyond its end, smoked a deeply-coloured pipe, and did not listen, thinking of the girl's face when she brought in a relay of cakes. It had been exactly like looking at a flower, or some other pretty sight in Nature—till, with a funny little shiver, she had lowered her glance and gone out, quiet as a mouse.

"Let's go to the kitchen," said Garton, "and see some more of her."

The kitchen was a white-washed room with rafters, to which were attached smoked hams; there were flower-pots on the window-sill, and guns hanging on nails, queer mugs, china and pewter, and portraits of Queen Victoria. A long, narrow table of plain wood was set with bowls and spoons, under a string of high-hung onions; two sheep-dogs and three cats lay here and there. On one side of the recessed fireplace sat two small boys, idle, and good as gold; on the other sat a stout, light-eyed, red-faced youth with hair and lashes the colour of the tow he was running through the barrel of a gun; between them Mrs. Narracombe dreamily stirred some savoury-scented stew in a large pot. Two other youths, oblique-eyed, dark-haired, rather sly-faced, like the two little boys, were talking together and lolling against the wall; and a short, elderly, clean-shaven man in corduroys, seated in the window, was conning a battered journal. The girl Megan seemed the only active creature—drawing cider and passing with the jugs from cask to table. Seeing them thus about to eat, Garton said:

"Ah! If you'll let us, we'll come back when

supper's over," and without waiting for an answer they withdrew again to the parlour. But the colour in the kitchen, the warmth, the scents, and all those faces, heightened the bleakness of their shiny room, and they resumed their seats moodily.

"Regular gipsy type, those boys. There was only one Saxon—the fellow cleaning the gun. That girl is a very subtle study psychologically."

Ashurst's lips twitched. Garton seemed to him an ass just then. Subtle study! She was a wild flower. A creature it did you good to look at. Study!

Garton went on:

"Emotionally she would be wonderful. She wants awakening."

"Are you going to awaken her?"

Garton looked at him and smiled. 'How coarse and English you are!' that curly smile seemed saying.

And Ashurst puffed his pipe. Awaken her! This fool had the best opinion of himself! He threw up the window and leaned out. Dusk had gathered thick. The farm buildings and the wheel-house were all dim and bluish, the apple-trees but a blurred wilderness; the air smelled of wood-smoke from the kitchen fire. One bird going to bed later than the others was uttering a half-hearted twitter, as though surprised at the darkness. From the stable came the snuffle and stamp of a feeding horse. And away over there was the loom of the moor, and away and away the shy stars which had not as yet full light, pricking white through the deep blue heavens. A quavering owl hooted. Ashurst drew a deep breath. What a night to wander out in! A padding of unshod hoofs came up the lane, and three dim, dark shapes passed—ponies on an evening march. Their heads, black and fuzzy, showed above the gate.

At the tap of his pipe, and a shower of little sparks, they shied round and scampered. A bat went fluttering past, uttering its almost inaudible "chip, chip." Ashurst held out his hand; on the upturned palm he could feel the dew. Suddenly from overhead he heard little burring boys' voices, little thumps of boots thrown down, and another voice, crisp and soft—the girl's putting them to bed, no doubt; and nine clear words: "No, Rick, you can't have the cat in bed"; then came a skirmish of giggles and gurgles, a soft slap, a laugh so low and pretty that it made him shiver a little. A blowing sound, and the glim of the candle which was fingering the dusk above, went out; silence reigned. Ashurst withdrew into the room and sat down; his knee pained him, and his soul felt gloomy.

"You go to the kitchen," he said; "I'm going to bed."

3 §

For Ashurst the wheel of slumber was wont to turn noiseless and slick and swift, but though he seemed sunk in sleep when his companion came up, he was really wide awake; and long after Garton, smothered in the other bed of that low-roofed room, was worshipping darkness with his upturned nose, he heard the owls. Barring the discomfort of his knee, it was not unpleasant—the cares of life did not loom large in night watches for this young man. In fact he had none; just enrolled a barrister, with literary aspirations, the world before him, no father or mother, and four hundred a year of his own. Did it matter where he went, what he did, or when he did it? His bed, too, was hard, and this preserved him from fever. He lay, sniffing the scent of the night which drifted into the low room, through the open casement close to his head.

Except for a definite irritation with his friend, natural when you have tramped with a man for three days, Ashurst's memories and visions that sleepless night were kindly and wistful and exciting. One vision specially clear and unreasonable, for he had not even been conscious of noting it, was the face of the youth cleaning the gun; its intent, stolid, yet startled uplook at the kitchen doorway, quickly shifted to the girl carrying the cider jug. This red, blue-eyed, light-lashed, tow-haired face stuck as firmly in his memory as the girl's own face, so dewy and simple. But at last, in the square of darkness through the uncurtained casement, he saw day coming, and heard one hoarse and sleepy caw. Then followed silence, dead as ever, till the song of a blackbird, not properly awake, adventured into the hush. And, from staring at the framed brightening light, Ashurst fell asleep.

Next day his knee was badly swollen; the walking tour was obviously over. Garton, due back in London on the morrow, departed at midday with an ironical smile which left a scar of irritation—healed the moment his loping figure vanished round the corner of the steep lane. All day Ashurst rested his knee, in a green-painted wooden chair on the patch of grass by the yew-tree porch, where the sunlight distilled the scent of stocks and gillyflowers, and a ghost of scent from the flowering-currant bushes. Beatifically he smoked, dreamed, watched.

A farm in spring is all birth—young things coming out of bud and shell, and human beings watching over the process with faint excitement feeding and tending what has been born. So still the young man sat, that a mother-goose, with stately cross-footed waddle, brought her six yellow-necked grey-backed goslings to

strop their little beaks against the grass blades at his feet. Now and again Mrs. Narracombe or the girl Megan would come and ask if he wanted anything, and he would smile and say: "Nothing, thanks. It's splendid here." Towards tea-time they came out together, bearing a long poultice of some dark stuff in a bowl, and after a long and solemn scrutiny of his swollen knee, bound it on. When they were gone, he thought of the girl's soft "Oh!" of her pitying eyes, and the little wrinkle in her brow. And again he felt that unreasoning irritation against his departed friend, who had talked such rot about her. When she brought out his tea, he said:

"How did you like my friend, Megan?"

She forced down her upper lip, as if afraid that to smile was not polite. "He was a funny gentleman; he made us laugh. I think he is very clever."

"What did he say to make you laugh?"

"He said I was a daughter of the bards. What are they?"

"Welsh poets, who lived hundreds of years ago."

"Why am I their daughter, please?"

"He means that you were the sort of girl they sang about."

She wrinkled her brows. "I think he likes to joke. Am I?"

"Would you believe me, if I told you?"

"Oh, yes."

"Well, I think he was right."

She smiled.

And Ashurst thought: 'You *are* a pretty thing!'

"He said, too, that Joe was a Saxon type. What would that be?"

"Which is Joe? With the blue eyes and red face?"

"Yes. My uncle's nephew."

"Not your cousin, then?"

"No."

"Well, he meant that Joe was like the men who came over to England about fourteen hundred years ago, and conquered it."

"Oh! I know about them; but is he?"

"Garton's crazy about that sort of thing; but I must say Joe does look a bit Early Saxon."

"Yes."

That "Yes" tickled Ashurst. It was so crisp and graceful, so conclusive, and politely acquiescent in what was evidently Greek to her.

"He said that all the other boys were regular gipsies. He should not have said that. My aunt laughed, but she didn't like it, of course, and my cousins were angry. Uncle was a farmer—farmers are not gipsies. It is wrong to hurt people."

Ashurst wanted to take her hand and give it a squeeze, but he only answered:

"Quite right, Megan. By the way, I heard you putting the little ones to bed last night."

She flushed a little. "Please to drink your tea—it is getting cold. Shall I get you some fresh?"

"Do you ever have time to do anything for yourself?"

"Oh, yes."

"I've been watching, but I haven't seen it yet."

She wrinkled her brows in a puzzled frown, and her colour deepened.

When she was gone, Ashurst thought: 'Did she think I was chaffing her? I wouldn't for the world!' He was at that age when to some men "Beauty's a flower," as the poet says, and inspires in them the

thoughts of chivalry. Never very conscious of his surroundings, it was some time before he was aware that the youth whom Garton had called "a Saxon type" was standing outside the stable door; and a fine bit of colour he made in his soiled brown velvet cords, muddy gaiters, and blue shirt; red-armed, red-faced, the sun turning his hair from tow to flax; immovably stolid, persistent, unsmiling he stood. Then, seeing Ashurst looking at him, he crossed the yard at that gait of the young country-man always ashamed not to be slow and heavy-dwelling on each leg, and disappeared round the end of the house towards the kitchen entrance. A chill came over Ashurst's mood. Clods! With all the good will in the world, how impossible to get on terms with them! And yet—see that girl! Her shoes were split, her hands rough; but—what was it? Was it really her Celtic blood, as Garton had said?—she was a lady born, a jewel, though probably she could do no more than just read and write!

The elderly, clean-shaven man he had seen last night in the kitchen had come into the yard with a dog, driving the cows to their milking. Ashurst saw that he was lame.

"You've got some good ones there!"

The lame man's face brightened. He had the upward look in his eyes which prolonged suffering often brings.

"Yeas; they'm praaper buties; gude milkers tu."

"I bet they are."

"'Ope as yure leg's better, zurr."

"Thank you, it's getting on."

The lame man touched his own: "I know what 'tes, meself; 'tes a main worritin' thing, the knee. I've a 'ad mine bad this ten year."

Ashurst made the sound of sympathy which comes so readily from those who have an independent income, and the lame man smiled again.

"Musn't complain, though—they mighty near 'ad it off."

"Ho ! "

"Yeas ; an' compared with what 'twas, 'tes almost so gude as nu."

"They've put a bandage of splendid stuff on mine."

"The maid she picks et. She'm a gude maid wi' the flowers. There's folks zeem to know the healin' in things. My mother was a rare one for that. 'Ope as yu'll zune be better, zurr. Goo ahn, therr ! "

Ashurst smiled. "Wi' the flowers !" A flower herself.

That evening, after his supper of cold duck, junket, and cider, the girl came in.

"Please, auntie says—will you try a piece of our Mayday cake ? "

"If I may come to the kitchen for it."

"Oh, yes ! You'll be missing your friend."

"Not I. But are you sure no one minds ? "

"Who would mind ? We shall be very pleased."

Ashurst rose too suddenly for his stiff knee, staggered, and subsided. The girl gave a little gasp, and held out her hands. Ashurst took them, small, rough, brown ; checked his impulse to put them to his lips, and let her pull him up. She came close beside him, offering her shoulder. And leaning on her he walked across the room. That shoulder seemed quite the pleasantest thing he had ever touched. But he had presence of mind enough to catch his stick out of the rack, and withdraw his hand before arriving at the kitchen.

That night he slept like a top, and woke with his

knee of almost normal size. He again spent the morning in his chair on the grass patch, scribbling down verses; but in the afternoon he wandered about with the two little boys Nick and Rick. It was Saturday, so they were early home from school; quick, shy, dark little rascals of seven and six, soon talkative, for Ashurst had a way with children. By four o'clock they had shown him all their methods of destroying life, except the tickling of trout; and with breeches tucked up, lay on their stomachs over the trout stream, pretending they had this accomplishment also. They tickled nothing, of course, for their giggling and shouting scared every spotted thing away. Ashurst, on a rock at the edge of the beech clump, watched them, and listened to the cuckoos, till Nick, the elder and less persevering, came up and stood beside him.

"The gipsy bogle zets on that stone," he said.

"What gipsy bogle?"

"Dunno; never zeen 'e. Megan zays 'e zets there; an' old Jim zeed 'e once. 'E was zettin' there naight afore our pony kicked-in father's 'ead. 'E plays the viddle."

"What tune does he play?"

"Dunno."

"What's he like?"

"'E's black. Old Jim zays 'e's all over 'air. 'E's a praaper bogle. 'E don' come only at naight." The little boy's oblique dark eyes slid round. "D'yu think 'e might want to take me away? Megan's feared of 'e."

"Has she seen him?"

"No. She's not afeared o' yu."

"I should think not. Why should she be?"

"She zays a prayer for yu."

"How do you know that, you little rascal?"

"When I was asleep, she said: 'God bless us all, an' Mr. Ashes.' I year'd 'er whisperin'."

"You're a little ruffian to tell what you hear when you're not meant to hear it!"

The little boy was silent. Then he said aggressively:

"I can skin rabbits. Megan, she can't bear skinnin' 'em. I like blood."

"Oh! you do; you little monster!"

"What's that?"

"A creature that likes hurting others."

The little boy scowled. "They'm only dead rabbits, what us eats."

"Quite right, Nick. I beg your pardon."

"I can skin frogs, tu."

But Ashurst had become absent. "God bless us all, and Mr. Ashes!" And puzzled by that sudden inaccessibility, Nick ran back to the stream where the giggling and shouts again uprose at once.

When Megan brought his tea, he said:

"What's the gipsy bogle, Megan?"

She looked up, startled.

"He brings bad things."

"Surely you don't believe in ghosts?"

"I hope I will never see him."

"Of course you won't. There aren't such things. What old Jim saw was a pony."

"No! There are bogles in the rocks; they are the men who lived long ago."

"They aren't gipsies, anyway; those old men were dead long before gipsies came."

She said simply: "They are all bad."

"Why? If there are any, they're only wild, like the rabbits. The flowers aren't bad for being wild;

the thorn trees were never planted—and you don't mind them. I shall go down at night and look for your bogle, and have a talk with him."

"Oh, no! Oh, no!"

"Oh, yes! I shall go and sit on his rock."

She clasped her hands together: "Oh, please!"

"Why! What does it matter if anything happens to me?"

She did not answer; and in a sort of pet he added:

"Well, I daresay I shan't see him, because I suppose I must be off soon."

"Soon?"

"Your aunt won't want to keep me here."

"Oh, yes! We always let lodgings in summer."

Fixing his eyes on her face, he asked:

"Would you like me to stay?"

"Yes."

"I'm going to say a prayer for *you* to-night!"

She flushed crimson, frowned, and went out of the room. He sat cursing himself, till his tea was stewed. It was as if he had hacked with his thick boots at a clump of bluebells. Why had he said such a silly thing? Was he just a towny college ass like Robert Garton, as far from understanding this girl?

4 §

Ashurst spent the next week confirming the restoration of his leg, by exploration of the country within easy reach. Spring was a revelation to him this year. In a kind of intoxication he would watch the pink-white buds of some backward beech tree sprayed up in the sunlight against the deep blue sky, or the trunks and limbs of the few Scotch firs, tawny in violent light, or again on the moor, the gale-bent larches which had

such a look of life when the wind streamed in their young green, above the rusty black underboughs. Or he would lie on the banks, gazing at the clusters of dog-violets, or up in the dead bracken, fingering the pink, transparent buds of the dewberry, while the cuckoos called and yaffles laughed, or a lark, from very high, dripped its beads of song. It was certainly different from any spring he had ever known, for spring was within him, not without. In the daytime he hardly saw the family; and when Megan brought in his meals she always seemed too busy in the house or among the young things in the yard to stay talking long. But in the evenings he installed himself in the window seat in the kitchen, smoking and chatting with the lame man Jim, or Mrs. Narracombe, while the girl sewed, or moved about, clearing the supper things away. And sometimes with the sensation a cat must feel when it purrs, he would become conscious that Megan's eyes—those dew-grey eyes—were fixed on him with a sort of lingering soft look which was strangely flattering.

It was on Sunday week in the evening, when he was lying in the orchard listening to a blackbird and composing a love poem, that he heard the gate swing to, and saw the girl come running among the trees, with the red-cheeked, stolid Joe in swift pursuit. About twenty yards away the chase ended, and the two stood fronting each other, not noticing the stranger in the grass—the boy pressing on, the girl fending him off. Ashurst could see her face, angry, disturbed; and the youth's—who would have thought that red-faced yokel could look so distraught! And painfully affected by that sight, he jumped up. They saw him then. Megan dropped her hands, and shrank behind a tree-trunk; the boy gave an angry grunt, rushed at the bank,

scrambled over and vanished. Ashurst went slowly up to her. She was standing quite still, biting her lip—very pretty, with her fine, dark hair blown loose about her face, and her eyes cast down.

"I beg your pardon," he said.

She gave him one upward look, from eyes much dilated; then, catching her breath, turned away. Ashurst followed.

"Megan!"

But she went on; and taking hold of her arm, he turned her gently round to him.

"Stop and speak to me."

"Why do you beg my pardon? It is not to me you should do that."

"Well, then, to Joe."

"How dare he come after me?"

"In love with you, I suppose."

She stamped her foot.

Ashurst uttered a short laugh. "Would you like me to punch his head?"

She cried with sudden passion:

"You laugh at me—you laugh at us!"

He caught hold of her hands, but she shrank back, till her passionate little face and loose dark hair were caught among the pink clusters of the apple blossom. Ashurst raised one of her imprisoned hands and put his lips to it. He felt how chivalrous he was, and superior to that clod Joe—just brushing that small, rough hand with his mouth! Her shrinking ceased suddenly; she seemed to tremble towards him. A sweet warmth overtook Ashurst from top to toe. This slim maiden, so simple and fine and pretty, was pleased, then, at the touch of his lips! And, yielding to a swift impulse, he put his arms round her, pressed her to him,

and kissed her forehead. Then he was frightened—she went so pale, closing her eyes, so that the long, dark lashes lay on her pale cheeks ; her hands, too, lay inert at her sides. The touch of her breast sent a shiver through him. “Megan !” he sighed out, and let her go. In the utter silence a black-bird shouted. Then the girl seized his hand, put it to her cheek, her heart, her lips, kissed it passionately, and fled away among the mossy trunks of the apple-trees, till they hid her from him.

Ashurst sat down on a twisted old tree growing almost along the ground, and, all throbbing and bewildered, gazed vacantly at the blossom which had crowned her hair—those pink buds with one white open apple star. What had he done ? How had he let himself be thus stampeded by beauty—or—just the spring ! He felt curiously happy, all the same ; happy and triumphant, with shivers running through his limbs, and a vague alarm. This was the beginning of—what ? The midges bit him, the dancing gnats tried to fly into his mouth, and all the spring around him seemed to grow more lovely and alive ; the songs of the cuckoos and the blackbirds, the laughter of the yaffles, the level-slanting sunlight, the apple blossom which had crowned her head—— ! He got up from the old trunk and strode out of the orchard, wanting space, an open sky, to get on terms with these new sensations. He made for the moor, and from an ash tree in the hedge a magpie flew out to herald him.

Of man—at any age from five years on—who can say he has never been in love ? Ashurst had loved his partners at his dancing class ; loved his nursery governess ; girls in school-holidays ; perhaps never been quite out of love, cherishing always some more or less

remote admiration. But this was different, not remote at all. Quite a new sensation; terribly delightful, bringing a sense of completed manhood. To be holding in his fingers such a wild flower, to be able to put it to his lips, and feel it tremble with delight against them! What intoxication, and—embarrassment! What to do with it—how meet her next time? His first caress had been cool, pitiful; but the next could not be, now that, by her burning little kiss on his hand, by her pressure of it to her heart, he knew that she loved him. Some natures are coarsened by love bestowed on them; others, like Ashurst's, are swayed and drawn, warmed and softened, almost exalted, by what they feel to be a sort of miracle.

And up there among the tors he was racked between the passionate desire to revel in this new sensation of spring fulfilled within him, and a vague but very real uneasiness. At one moment he gave himself up completely to his pride at having captured this pretty, trustful, dewy-eyed thing! At the next he thought with factitious solemnity: 'Yes, my boy! But look out what you're doing! You know what comes of it!'

Dusk dropped down without his noticing—dusk on the carved, Assyrian-looking masses of the rocks. And the voice of Nature said: "This is a new world for you!" As when a man gets up at four o'clock and goes out into a summer morning, and beasts, birds, trees stare at him and he feels as if all had been made new.

He stayed up there for hours, till it grew cold, then groped his way down the stones and heather roots to the road, back into the lane, and came again past the wild meadow to the orchard. There he struck a match

and looked at his watch. Nearly twelve! It was black and unstirring in there now, very different from the lingering, bird-befriended brightness of six hours ago! And suddenly he saw this idyll of his with the eyes of the outer world—had mental vision of Mrs. Narracombe's snake-like neck turned, her quick dark glance taking it all in, her shrewd face hardening; saw the gipsy-like cousins coarsely mocking and distrustful; Joe stolid and furious; only the lame man, Jim, with the suffering eyes, seemed tolerable to his mind. And the village pub!—the gossiping matrons he passed on his walks; and then—his own friends—Robert Garton's smile when he went off that morning ten days ago; so ironical and knowing! Disgusting! For a minute he literally hated this earthly, cynical world to which one belonged, willy-nilly. The gate where he was leaning grew grey, a sort of shimmer passed before him and spread into the bluish darkness. The moon! He could just see it over the bank behind; red, nearly round—a strange moon! And turning away, he went up the lane which smelled of the night and cow-dung and young leaves. In the straw-yard he could see the dark shapes of cattle, broken by the pale sickles of their horns, like so many thin moons, fallen ends-up. He unlatched the farm gate stealthily. All was dark in the house. Muffling his footsteps, he gained the porch, and, blotted against one of the yew trees, looked up at Megan's window. It was open. Was she sleeping, or lying awake perhaps, disturbed—unhappy at his absence? An owl hooted while he stood there peering up, and the sound seemed to fill the whole night, so quiet was all else, save for the never-ending murmur of the stream running below the orchard. The cuckoos by day, and now the owls—

how wonderfully they voiced this troubled ecstasy within him! And suddenly he saw her at her window, looking out. He moved a little from the yew tree, and whispered: "Megan!" She drew back, vanished, reappeared, leaning far down. He stole forward on the grass patch, hit his shin against the green-painted chair, and held his breath at the sound. The pale blur of her stretched-down arm and face did not stir; he moved the chair, and noiselessly mounted it. By stretching up his arm he could just reach. Her hand held the huge key of the front door, and he clasped that burning hand with the cold key in it. He could just see her face, the glint of teeth between her lips, her tumbled hair. She was still dressed—poor child, sitting up for him, no doubt! "Pretty Megan!" Her hot, roughened fingers clung to his; her face had a strange, lost look. To have been able to reach it—even with his hand! The owl hooted, a scent of sweetbriar crept into his nostrils. Then one of the farm dogs barked; her grasp relaxed, she shrank back.

"Good-night, Megan!"

"Good-night, sir!" She was gone! With a sigh he dropped back to earth, and sitting on that chair, took off his boots. Nothing for it but to creep in and go to bed; yet for a long while he sat unmoving, his feet chilly in the dew, drunk on the memory of her lost, half-smiling face, and the clinging grip of her burning fingers, pressing the cold key into his hand.

§ §

He awoke feeling as if he had eaten heavily overnight, instead of having eaten nothing. And far off, unreal, seemed yesterday's romance! Yet it was a golden morning. Full spring had burst at last—in one night

the "goldie-cups," as the little boys called them, seemed to have made the field their own, and from his window he could see apple blossoms covering the orchard as with a rose and white quilt. He went down almost dreading to see Megan; and yet, when not she but Mrs. Narracombe brought in his breakfast, he felt vexed and disappointed. The woman's quick eye and snaky neck seemed to have a new alacrity this morning. Had she noticed?

"So you an' the moon went walkin' last night, Mr. Ashurst! Did ye have your supper anywheres?"

Ashurst shook his head.

"We kept it for you, but I suppose you was too busy in your brain to think o' such a thing as that?"

Was she mocking him, in that voice of hers, which still kept some Welsh crispness against the invading burr of the West Country? If she knew! And at that moment he thought: 'No, no; I'll clear out. I won't put myself in such a beastly false position.'

But, after breakfast, the longing to see Megan began and increased with every minute, together with fear lest something should have been said to her which had spoiled everything. Sinister that she had not appeared, not given him even a glimpse of her! And the loved poem, whose manufacture had been so important and absorbing yesterday afternoon under the apple-trees, now seemed so paltry that he tore it up and rolled it into pipe spills. What had he known of love, till she seized his hand and kissed it! And now—what did he not know? But to write of it seemed mere insipidity! He went up to his bedroom to get a book, and his heart began to beat violently, for she was in there making the bed. He stood in the doorway watching; and suddenly, with turbulent joy, he saw

her stoop and kiss his pillow just at the hollow made by his head last night. How let her know he had seen that pretty act of devotion? And yet, if she heard him stealing away, it would be even worse. She took the pillow up, holding it as if reluctant to shake out the impress of his cheek, dropped it, and turned round.

“Megan!”

She put her hands up to her cheeks, but her eyes seemed to look right into him. He had never before realised the depth and purity and touching faithfulness in those dew-bright eyes, and he stammered :

“It was sweet of you to wait up for me last night.”

She still said nothing, and he stammered on :

“I was wandering about on the moor ; it was such a jolly night. I—I’ve just come up for a book.”

Then, the kiss he had seen her give the pillow afflicted him with sudden headiness, and he went up to her. Touching her eyes with his lips, he thought with queer excitement : ‘I’ve done it ! Yesterday all was sudden—anyhow ; but now—I’ve done it !’ The girl let her forehead rest against his lips, which moved downwards till they reached hers. That first real lover’s kiss—strange, wonderful, still almost innocent—in which heart did it make the most disturbance ?

“Come to the big apple-tree to-night, after they’ve gone to bed. Megan—promise !”

She whispered back : “I promise !”

Then, scared at her white face, scared at everything, he let her go, and went downstairs again. Yes ! he had done it now ! Accepted her love, declared his own ! He went out to the green chair as devoid of a book as ever ; and there he sat staring vacantly before him, triumphant and remorseful, while under his nose and behind his back the work of the farm went on.

How long he had been sitting in that curious state of vacancy he had no notion when he saw Joe standing a little behind him to the right. The youth had evidently come from hard work in the fields, and stood shifting his feet, breathing loudly, his face coloured like a setting sun, and his arms, below the rolled-up sleeves of his blue shirt, showing the hue and furry sheen of ripe peaches. His red lips were open, his blue eyes with their flaxen lashes stared fixedly at Ashurst, who said ironically :

"Well, Joe, anything I can do for you ?"

"Yea."

"What, then ?"

"Yu can goo away from yere. Us don' want yu."

Ashurst's face, never too humble, assumed its most lordly look.

"Very good of you, but, do you know, I prefer the others should speak for themselves."

The youth moved a pace or two nearer, and the scent of his honest heat afflicted Ashurst's nostrils.

"What d'yu stay yere for ?"

"Because it pleases me."

"Twon't please yu when I've bashed yure head in !"

"Indeed ! When would you like to begin that ?"

Joe answered only with the loudness of his breathing, but his eyes looked like those of a young and angry bull. Then a sort of spasm seemed to convulse his face.

"Megan don' want yu."

A rush of jealousy, of contempt, and anger with this thick, loud-breathing rustic got the better of Ashurst's self-possession ; he jumped up and pushed back his chair.

"You can go to the devil !"

And as he said those simple words, he saw Megan in the doorway with a tiny brown spaniel puppy in her arms. She came up to him quickly :

" Its eyes are blue ! " she said.

Joe turned away ; the back of his neck was literally crimson.

Ashurst put his finger to the mouth of the little brown bull-frog of a creature in her arms. How cosy it looked against her !

" It's fond of you already. Ah ! Megan, everything is fond of *you*."

" What was Joe saying to you, please ? "

" Telling me to go away, because you didn't want me here."

She stamped her foot ; then looked up at Ashurst. At that adoring look he felt his nerves quiver, just as if he had seen a moth scorching its wings.

" To-night ! " he said. " Don't forget ! "

" No." And smothering her face against the puppy's little fat, brown body, she slipped back into the house.

Ashurst wandered down the lane. At the gate of the wild meadow he came on the lame man and his cows.

" Beautiful day, Jim ! "

" Ah ! 'T'es brave weather for the grass. The ashes be later than th' oaks this year. ' When th' oak before th' ash——' "

Ashurst said idly : " Where were you standing when you saw the gipsy bogle, Jim ? "

" It might be under that big apple-tree, as you might say

" And you really do think it was there ? "

The lame man answered cautiously :

"I shouldn't like to say rightly that 't *was* there. 'Twas in my mind as 'twas there."

"What do you make of it?"

The lame man lowered his voice.

"They du zay old master, Mist' Narracombe, come o' gipsy stock. But that's tellin'. They'm a wonderful people, yu know, for claimin' their own. Maybe they knu 'e was goin', and sent this feller along for company. That's what I've a-thought about it."

"What was he like?"

"'E 'ad 'air all over 'is face, an' goin' like this, he was, zame as if 'e 'ad a viddle. They zay there's no such thing as bogles, but I've a-zeen the 'air on this dog standin' up of a dark naight, when I couldn' zee nothin', meself."

"Was there a moon?"

"Yeas, very near full, but 'twas on'y just risen, gold-like be'ind them trees."

"And you think a ghost means trouble, do you?"

The lame man pushed his hat up; his aspiring eyes looked at Ashurst more earnestly than ever.

"'T'es not for me to zay that—but 'tes they bein' so unrestin'-like. There's things us don' understand, that's zartin, for zure. There's people that zee things, tu, an' others that don't never zee nothin'. Now, our Joe—yu might putt anything under 'is eyes an' 'e'd never see it; and them other boys, tu, they'm rattlin' fellers. But yu take an' putt our Megan where there's suthin', she'll zee it, an' more tu, or I'm mistaken."

"She's sensitive, that's why."

"What's that?"

"I mean, she feels everything."

"Ah! She'm very lovin'-carted."

Ashurst, who felt colour coming into his cheeks, held out his tobacco pouch.

"Have a fill, Jim?"

"Thank 'ee, sir. She'm one in an 'underd, I think."

"I expect so," said Ashurst shortly, and folding up his pouch, walked on.

"Lovin'-hearted!" Yes! And what was he doing? What were his intentions—as they say—towards this loving-hearted girl? The thought dogged him, wandering through fields bright with buttercups, where the little red calves were feeding, and the swallows flying high. Yes, the oaks were before the ashes, brown-gold already; every tree in different stage and hue. The cuckoos and a thousand birds were singing; the little streams were very bright. The ancients believed in a golden age, in the garden of the Hesperides! . . . A queen wasp settled on his sleeve. Each queen wasp killed meant two thousand fewer wasps to thieve the apples which would grow from that blossom in the orchard; but who, with love in his heart, could kill anything on a day like this? He entered a field where a young red bull was feeding. It seemed to Ashurst that he looked like Joe. But the young bull took no notice of this visitor, a little drunk himself, perhaps, on the singing and the glamour of the golden pasture, under his short legs. Ashurst crossed out unchallenged to the hillside above the stream. From that slope a tor mounted to its crown of rocks. The ground there was covered with a mist of bluebells, and nearly a score of crab-apple trees were in full bloom. He threw himself down on the grass. The change from the buttercup glory and oak-goldened glamour of the fields to this ethereal beauty under the grey tor filled him with a sort of wonder; nothing the

same, save the sound of running water, and the songs of the cuckoos. He lay there a long time, watching the sunlight wheel till the crab-trees threw shadows over the bluebells, his only companions a few wild bees. He was not quite sane, thinking of that morning's kiss, and of to-night under the apple-tree. In such a spot as this, fauns and dryads surely lived; nymphs, white as the crab-apple blossom, retired within those trees; fauns, brown as the dead bracken with pointed ears, lay in wait for them. The cuckoos were still calling when he woke, there was the sound of running water; but the sun had couched behind the tor, the hillside was cool, and some rabbits had come out. 'To-night!' he thought. Just as from the earth everything was pushing up, unfolding under the soft insistent fingers of an unseen hand, so were his heart and senses being pushed, unfolded. He got up and broke off a spray from a crab-apple tree. The buds were like Megan—shell-like, rose-pink, wild, and fresh; and so, too, the opening flowers, white, and wild, and touching. He put the spray into his coat. And all the rush of the spring within him escaped in a triumphant sigh. But the rabbits scurried away.

6 §

It was nearly eleven that night when Ashurst put down the pocket "Odyssey" which for half an hour he had held in his hands without reading, and slipped through the yard down to the orchard. The moon had just risen, very golden, over the hill, and like a bright, powerful, watching spirit peered through the bars of an ash tree's half-naked boughs. In among the apple-trees it was still dark, and he stood making sure of his direction, feeling the rough grass with his

feet. A black mass close behind him stirred with a heavy grunting sound, and three large pigs settled down again close to each other, under the wall. He listened. There was no wind, but the stream's burbling whispering chuckle had gained twice its daytime strength. One bird, he could not tell what, cried "Pip—pip," "Pip—pip," with perfect monotony; he could hear a night-jar spinning very far off; an owl hooting. Ashurst moved a step or two, and again halted, aware of a dim living whiteness all round his head. On the dark unstirring trees innumerable flowers and buds all soft and blurred were being bewitched to life by the creeping moonlight. He had the oddest feeling of actual companionship, as if a million white moths or spirits had floated in and settled between dark sky and darker ground, and were opening and shutting their wings on a level with his eyes. In the bewildering, still, scentless beauty of that moment he almost lost memory of why he had come to the orchard. The flying glamour which had clothed the earth all day had not gone now that night had fallen, but only changed into this new form. He moved on through the thicket of stems and boughs covered with that live powdering whiteness, till he reached the big apple-tree. No mistaking that, even in the dark, nearly twice the height and size of any other; and leaning out towards the open meadows and the stream. Under the thick branches he stood still again, to listen. The same sounds exactly, and a faint grunting from the sleepy pigs. He put his hands on the dry, almost warm tree trunk, whose rough mossy surface gave forth a peaty scent at his touch. Would she come—would she? And among these quivering, haunted, moon-witched trees he was seized with doubts of everything! All

was unearthly here, fit for no earthly lovers ; fit only for god and goddess, faun and nymph—not for him and this little country girl. Would it not be almost a relief if she did not come ? But all the time he was listening. And still that unknown bird went “ Pip—pip,” “ Pip—pip,” and there rose the busy chatter of the little trout stream, whereon the moon was flinging glances through the bars of her tree-prison. The blossom on a level with his eyes seemed to grow more living every moment, seemed with its mysterious white beauty more and more a part of his suspense. He plucked a fragment and held it close—three blossoms. Sacrilege to pluck fruit-tree blossom—soft, sacred, young blossom—and throw it away ! Then suddenly he heard the gate close, the pigs stirring again and grunting ; and leaning against the trunk, he pressed his hands to its mossy sides behind him, and held his breath. She might have been a spirit threading the trees, for all the noise she made ! Then he saw her quite close—her dark form part of a little tree, her white face part of its blossom ; so still, and peering towards him. He whispered : “ Megan ! ” and held out his hands. She ran forward, straight to his breast. When he felt her heart beating against him, Ashurst knew to the full the sensations of chivalry and passion. Because she was not of his world, because she was so simple and young and head-long, adoring and defenceless, how could he be other than her protector, in the dark ! Because she was all simple Nature and beauty, as much a part of this spring night as was the living blossom, how should he not take all that she would give him—how not fulfil the spring in her heart and his ! And torn between these two emotions he clasped her close, and kissed her hair. How long they stood

there without speaking he knew not. The stream went on chattering, the owls hooting, the moon kept stealing up and growing whiter; the blossom all round them and above brightened in suspense of living beauty. Their lips had sought each other's, and they did not speak. The moment speech began all would be unreal! Spring has no speech, nothing but rustling and whispering. Spring has so much more than speech in its unfolding flowers and leaves, and the coursing of its streams, and in its sweet restless seeking! And sometimes spring will come alive, and, like a mysterious Presence, stand, encircling lovers with its arms, laying on them the fingers of enchantment, so that, standing lips to lips, they forget everything but just a kiss. While her heart beat against him, and her lips quivered on his, Ashurst felt nothing but simple rapture—Destiny meant her for his arms, Love could not be flouted! But when their lips parted for breath, division began again at once. Only, passion now was so much the stronger, and he sighed:

"Oh! Megan! Why did you come?"

She looked up, hurt, amazed.

"Sir, you asked me to."

"Don't call me 'sir,' my pretty sweet."

"What should I be callin' you?"

"Frank."

"I could not. Oh, no!"

"But you love me—don't you?"

"I could not help lovin' you. I want to be with you—that's all."

"All!"

So faint that he hardly heard, she whispered:

"I shall die if I can't be with you."

Ashurst took a mighty breath.

"Come and be with me, then!"

"Oh!"

Intoxicated by the awe and rapture in that "Oh!" he went on, whispering:

"We'll go to London. I'll show you the world. And I *will* take care of you, I promise, Megan. I'll never be a brute to you!"

"If I can be with you—that is all."

He stroked her hair, and whispered on:

"To-morrow I'll go to Torquay and get some money, and get you some clothes that won't be noticed, and then we'll steal away. And when we get to London, soon perhaps, if you love me well enough, we'll be married."

He could feel her hair shiver with the shake of her head.

"Oh, no! I could not. I only want to be with you!"

Drunk on his own chivalry, Ashurst went on murmuring:

"It's I who am not good enough for you. Oh! Megan, when did you begin to love me?"

"When I saw you in the road, and you looked at me. The first night I loved you; but I never thought you would want me."

She slipped down suddenly to her knees, trying to kiss his feet.

A shiver of horror went through Ashurst; he lifted her up bodily and held her fast—too upset to speak.

She whispered: "Why won't you let me?"

"It's I who will kiss your feet!"

Her smile brought tears into his eyes. The whiteness of her moonlit face so close to his, the faint pink

of her opened lips, and the living unearthly beauty of the apple blossom.

And then, suddenly, her eyes widened and stared past him painfully; she writhed out of his arms, and whispered: "Look!"

Ashurst saw nothing but the brightened stream, the furze faintly gilded, the beech trees glistening, and behind them all the wide loom of the moonlit hill. Behind him came her frozen whisper: "The gipsy bogle!"

"Where?"

"There—by the stone—under the trees!"

Exasperated, he leapt the stream, and strode towards the beech clump. Prank of the moonlight! Nothing! In and out of the boulders and thorn trees, muttering and cursing, yet with a kind of terror, he rushed and stumbled. Absurd! Silly! Then he went back to the apple-tree. But she was gone; he could hear a rustle, the grunting of the pigs, the sound of a gate closing. Instead of her, only this old apple-tree! He flung his arms round the trunk. What a substitute for her soft body; the rough moss against his face—what a substitute for her soft cheek; only the scent, as of the woods, a little the same! And above him, and around, the blossoms, more living, more moonlit than ever, seemed to glow and breathe.

7 §

Descending from the train at Torquay station, Ashurst wandered uncertainly along the front, for he did not know this particular queen of English watering places. Having little sense of what he had on, he was quite unconscious of being remarkable among its inhabitants, and strode along in his rough Norfolk

jacket, dusty boots, and battered hat, without observing that people gazed at him rather blankly. He was seeking a branch of his London bank, and having found one, found also the first obstacle to his mood. Did he know anyone in Torquay? No. In that case, if he would wire to his bank in London, they would be happy to oblige him on receipt of the reply. That suspicious breath from the matter-of-fact world somewhat tarnished the brightness of his visions. But he sent the telegram.

Nearly opposite to the post office he saw a shop full of ladies' garments, and examined the window with strange sensations. To have to undertake the clothing of his rustic love was more than a little disturbing. He went in. A young woman came forward; she had blue eyes and a faintly puzzled forehead. Ashurst stared at her in silence.

"Yes, sir?"

"I want a dress for a young lady."

The young woman smiled. Ashurst frowned—the peculiarity of his request struck him with sudden force.

The young woman added hastily:

"What style would you like—something modish?"

"No. Simple."

"What figure would the young lady be?"

"I don't know; about two inches shorter than you, I should say."

"Could you give me her waist measurement?"

Megan's waist!

"Oh! anything usual!"

"Quite!"

While she was gone he stood disconsolately eyeing the models in the window, and suddenly it seemed to him incredible that Megan—his Megan—could ever be

dressed save in that rough tweed skirt, coarse blouse, and tam-o'-shanter cap he was wont to see her in. The young woman had come back with several dresses in her arms, and Ashurst eyed her laying them against her own modish figure. There was one whose colour he liked, a dove-grey, but to imagine Megan clothed in it was beyond him. The young woman went away and brought some more. But on Ashurst there had now come a feeling of paralysis. How choose? She would want a hat too, and shoes, and gloves; and, suppose, when he had got them all, they commonised her, as Sunday clothes always commonised village folk! Why should she not travel as she was? Ah! But conspicuousness would matter; this was a serious elopement. And, staring at the young woman, he thought: 'I wonder if she guesses, and thinks me a blackguard?'

"Do you mind putting aside that grey one for me?" he said desperately at last. "I can't decide now; I'll come in again this afternoon."

The young woman sighed.

"Oh! certainly. It's a very tasteful costume. I don't think you'll get anything that will suit your purpose better."

"I expect not," Ashurst murmured, and went out.

Freed again from the suspicious matter-of-factness of the world, he took a long breath, and went back to visions. In fancy he saw the trustful, pretty creature who was going to join her life to his; saw himself and her stealing forth at night, walking over the moor under the moon, he with his arm round her, and carrying her new garments, till, in some far-off wood, when dawn was coming, she would slip off her old things and put on these, and an early train at a distant station would

bear them away on their honeymoon journey, till London swallowed them up, and the dreams of love came true.

“ Frank Ashurst ! Haven’t seen you since Rugby, old chap ! ”

Ashurst’s frown dissolved ; the face, close to his own, was blue-eyed, suffused with sun—one of those faces where sun from within and without join in a sort of lustre. And he answered :

“ Phil Halliday, by Jove ! ”

“ What are you doing here ! ”

“ Oh ! nothing. Just looking round, and getting some money. I’m staying on the moor.”

“ Are you lunching anywhere ? Come and lunch with us ; I’m here with my young sisters. They’ve had measles.”

Hooked in by that friendly arm Ashurst went along, up a hill, down a hill, away out of the town, while the voice of Halliday, redolent of optimism as his face was of sun, explained how “ in this mouldy place the only decent things were the bathing and boating,” and so on, till presently they came to a crescent of houses a little above and back from the sea, and into the centre one—an hotel—made their way.

“ Come up to my room and have a wash. Lunch’ll be ready in a jiffy.”

Ashurst contemplated his visage in a looking-glass. After his farmhouse bedroom, the comb and one spare shirt *régime* of the last fortnight, this room littered with clothes and brushes was a sort of Capua ; and he thought : ‘ Queer—one doesn’t realise—’ But what—he did not quite know.

When he followed Halliday into the sitting-room for lunch, three faces, very fair and blue-eyed, were

turned suddenly at the words: "This is Frank Ashurst—my young sisters."

Two were indeed young, about eleven and ten. The third was perhaps seventeen, tall and fair-haired too, with pink-and-white cheeks just touched by the sun, and eyebrows, rather darker than the hair, running a little upwards from her nose to their outer points. The voices of all three were like Halliday's, high and cheerful; they stood up straight, shook hands, with a quick movement, looked at Ashurst critically, away again at once, and began to talk of what they were going to do in the afternoon. A regular Diana and attendant nymphs! After the farm this crisp, slangy, eager talk, this cool, clean, off-hand refinement, was queer at first, and then so natural that what he had come from became suddenly remote. The names of the two little ones seemed to be Sabina and Freda; of the eldest, Stella.

Presently the one called Sabina turned to him and said:

"I say, will you come shrimping with us?—it's awful fun!"

Surprised by this unexpected friendliness, Ashurst murmured:

"I'm afraid I've got to get back this afternoon."

"Oh!"

"Can't you put it off?"

Ashurst turned to the new speaker, Stella, shook his head, and smiled. She was very pretty! Sabina said regretfully: "You might!" Then the talk switched off to caves and swimming.

"Can you swim far?"

"About two miles."

"Oh!"

"I say!"

"How jolly!"

The three pairs of blue eyes, fixed on him, made him conscious of his new importance. The sensation was agreeable. Halliday said:

"I say, you simply must stop and have a bathe. You'd better stay the night."

"Yes, do!"

But again Ashurst smiled and shook his head. Then suddenly he found himself being catechised about his physical achievements. He had rowed—it seemed—in his college boat, played in his college football team, won his college mile; and he rose from table a sort of hero. The two little girls insisted that he must see "their" cave, and they set forth chattering like magpies, Ashurst between them, Stella and her brother a little behind. In the cave, damp and darkish like any other cave, the great feature was a pool with possibility of creatures which might be caught and put into bottles. Sabina and Freda, who wore no stockings on their shapely brown legs, exhorted Ashurst to join them in the middle of it, and help sieve the water. He too was soon bootless and sockless. Time goes fast for one who has a sense of beauty, when there are pretty children in a pool and a young Diana on the edge to receive with wonder anything you can catch! Ashurst never had much sense of time. It was a shock when, pulling out his watch, he saw it was well past three. No cashing his cheque to-day—the bank would be closed before he could get there. Watching his expression, the little girls cried out at once:

"Hurrah! Now you'll have to stay!"

Ashurst did not answer. He was seeing again Megan's face, when at breakfast he had whispered: "I'm going to Torquay, darling, to get everything;"

I shall be back this evening. If it's fine we can go to-night. Be ready." He was seeing again how she quivered and hung on his words. What would she think? Then he pulled himself together, conscious suddenly of the calm scrutiny of this other young girl, so tall and fair and Diana-like, at the edge of the pool, of her wondering blue eyes under those brows which slanted up a little. If they knew what was in his mind—if they knew that this very night he had meant—I Well, there would be a little sound of disgust, and he would be alone in the cave. And with a curious mixture of anger, chagrin, and shame, he put his watch back into his pocket and said abruptly :

"Yes; I'm dished for to-day."

"Hurrah! Now you can bathe with us."

It was impossible not to succumb a little to the contentment of these pretty children, to the smile on Stella's lips, to Halliday's "Ripping, old chap! I can lend you things for the night!" But again a spasm of longing and remorse throbbed through Ashurst, and he said moodily :

"I must send a wire!"

The attractions of the pool palling, they went back to the hotel. Ashurst sent his wire, addressing it to Mrs. Narracombe: "Sorry, detained for the night, back to-morrow." Surely Megan would understand that he had too much to do; and his heart grew lighter. It was a lovely afternoon, warm, the sea calm and blue, and swimming his great passion; the favour of these pretty children flattered him, the pleasure of looking at them, at Stella, at Halliday's sunny face; the slight unreality, yet extreme naturalness of it all—as of a last peep at normality before he took this plunge with Megan! He got his borrowed bathing dress, and they

all set forth. Halliday and he undressed behind one rock, the tree girls behind another. He was first into the sea, and at once swam out with the bravado of justifying his self-given reputation. When he turned he could see Halliday swimming along shore, and the girls flopping and dipping, and riding the little waves, in the way he was accustomed to despise, but now thought pretty and sensible, since it gave him the distinction of the only deep-water fish. But drawing near, he wondered if they would like him, a stranger, to come into their splashing group; he felt shy, approaching that slim nymph. Then Sabina summoned him to teach her to float, and between them the little girls kept him so busy that he had no time even to notice whether Stella was accustomed to his presence, till suddenly he heard a startled sound from her. She was standing submerged to the waist, leaning a little forward, her slim white arms stretched out and pointing, her wet face puckered by the sun and an expression of fear.

"Look at Phil! Is he all right? Oh, look!"

Ashurst saw at once that Phil was not all right. He was splashing and struggling out of his depth, perhaps a hundred yards away; suddenly he gave a cry, threw up his arms, and went down. Ashurst saw the girl launch herself towards him, and crying out: "Go back, Stella! Go back!" he dashed out. He had never swum so fast, and reached Halliday just as he was coming up a second time. It was a case of cramp, but to get him in was not difficult, for he did not struggle. The girl, who had stopped where Ashurst told her to, helped as soon as he was in his depth, and once on the beach they sat down on each side of him to rub his limbs, while the little ones stood by with scared faces. Halliday was soon smiling. It was—

he said—rotten of him, absolutely rotten ! If Frank would give him an arm, he could get to his clothes all right now. Ashurst gave him the arm, and as he did so caught sight of Stella's face, wet and flushed and tearful, all broken up out of its calm ; and he thought : ' I called her Stella ! Wonder of she minded ? '

While they were dressing, Halliday said quietly :

" You saved my life, old chap ! "

" Rot ! "

Clothed, but not quite in their right minds, they went up all together to the hotel and sat down to tea except Halliday, who was lying down in his room. After some slices of bread and jam, Sabina said :

" I say, you know, you *are* a brick ! " And Freda chimed in :

" Rather ! "

Ashurst saw Stella looking down ; he got up in confusion, and went to the window. From there he heard Sabina mutter : " I say, let's swear blood bond. Where's your knife, Freda ? " and out of the corner of his eye could see each of them solemnly prick herself, squeeze out a drop of blood and dabble on a bit of paper. He turned and made for the door.

" Don't be a stoat ! Come back ! " His arms were seized ; imprisoned between the little girls he was brought back to the table. On it lay a piece of paper with an effigy drawn in blood, and the three names Stella Halliday, Sabina Halliday, Freda Halliday—also in blood, running towards it like the rays of a star. Sabina said :

" That's you. We shall have to kiss you, you know. "

And Freda echoed :

" Oh ! Blow—Yes ! "

Before Ashurst could escape, some wettish hair

dangled against his face, something like a bite descended on his nose, he felt his left arm pinched, and other teeth softly searching his cheek. Then he was released and Freda said :

“ Now Stella.”

Ashurst, red and rigid, looked across the table at a red and rigid Stella. Sabina giggled ; Freda cried :

“ Buck up—it spoils everything ! ”

A queer, ashamed eagerness shot through Ashurst : then he said quietly :

“ Shut up, you little demons ! ”

Again Sabina giggled.

“ Well, then, she can kiss her hand, and you can put it against your nose. *It is* on one side ! ”

To his amazement the girl did kiss her hand and stretch it out. Solemnly he took that cool, slim hand and laid it to his cheek. The two girls broke into clapping, and Freda said :

“ Now, then, we shall have to save your life at any time ; that’s settled. Can I have another cup, Stella, not so beastly weak ? ”

Tea was resumed, and Ashurst, folding up the paper, put it in his pocket. The talk turned on the advantages of measles, tangerine oranges, honey on a spoon, no lessons, and so forth. Ashurst listened, silent, exchanging friendly looks with Stella, whose face was again of its normal sun-touched pink and white. It was soothing to be so taken to the heart of this jolly family, fascinating to watch their faces. And after tea, while the two little girls pressed seaweed, he talked to Stella in the window seat and looked at her water-colour sketches. The whole thing was like a pleasurable dream ; time and incident hung up, importance and reality suspended. To-morrow he would go

back to Megan, with nothing of all this left save the paper with the blood of these children, in his pocket. Children! Stella was not quite that—as old as Megan! Her talk—quick, rather hard and shy; yet friendly—seemed to flourish on his silences, and about her there was something cool and virginal—a maiden in a bower. At dinner, to which Halliday, who had swallowed too much sea-water, did not come, Sabina said:

“I’m going to call you Frank.”

Freda echoed:

“Frank, Frank, Franky.”

Ashurst grinned and bowed.

“Every time Stella calls you Mr. Ashurst, she’s got to pay a forfeit. It’s ridiculous.”

Ashurst looked at Stella, who grew slowly red. Sabina giggled; Freda cried:

“She’s ‘smoking’—‘smoking!’—Yah!”

Ashurst reached out to right and left, and grasped some fair hair in each hand.

“Look here,” he said, “you two! Leave Stella alone, or I’ll tie you together!”

Freda gurgled:

“Ouch! You *are* a beast!”

Sabina murmured cautiously:

“You call *her* Stella, you see!”

“Why shouldn’t I? It’s a jolly name!”

“All right; we give you leave to!”

Ashurst released the hair. Stella! What would she call him—after this? But she called him nothing; till at bedtime he said, deliberately:

“Good-night, Stella!”

“Good-night, Mr.— Good-night, Frank! It *was* jolly of you, you know!”

“Oh—that! Bosh!”

Her quick, straight handshake tightened suddenly, and as suddenly, became slack.

Ashurst stood motionless in the empty sitting-room. Only last night, under the apple-tree and the living blossom, he had held Megan to him, kissing her eyes and lips. And he gasped, swept by that rush of remembrance. To-night it should have begun—his life with her who only wanted to be with him ! And now, twenty-four hours and more must pass, because of—not looking at his watch ! Why had he made friends with this family of innocents just when he was saying good-bye to innocence, and all the rest of it ? ‘ But I mean to marry her,’ he thought ; ‘ I told her so ! ’

He took a candle, lighted it, and went to his bedroom, which was next to Halliday’s. His friend’s voice called as he was passing :

“ Is that you, old chap ? I say, come in.”

He was sitting up in bed, smoking a pipe and reading.

“ Sit down a bit.”

Ashurst sat down by the open window.

“ I’ve been thinking about this afternoon, you know,” said Halliday rather suddenly. “ They say you go through all your past. I didn’t. I suppose I wasn’t far enough gone.”

“ What did you think of ? ”

Halliday was silent for a little, then said quietly :

“ Well, I did think of one thing—rather odd—of a girl at Cambridge that I might have—you know ; I was glad I hadn’t got her on my mind. Anyhow, old chap, I owe it to you that I’m here ; I should have been in the big dark by now. No more bed, or baccy ; no more anything. I say, what d’you suppose happens to us ? ”

Ashurst murmured :

“ Go out like flames, I expect.”

" Phew ! "

" We may flicker, and cling about a bit, perhaps."

" H'm ! I think that's rather gloomy. I say, I hope my young sisters have been decent to you ? "

" Awfully decent."

Halliday put his pipe down, crossed his hands behind his neck, and turned his face towards the window.

" They're not bad kids ! " he said.

Watching his friend, lying there, with that smile, and the candle-light on his face, Ashurst shuddered. Quite true ! He might have been lying there with no smile, with all that sunny look gone out for ever ! He might not have been lying there at all, but " sanded " at the bottom of the sea, waiting for resurrection on the—ninth day, was it ? And that smile of Halliday's seemed to him suddenly something wonderful, as if it were all the difference between life and death—the little flame—the all ! He got up, and said softly : " Well, you ought to sleep, I expect. Shall I blow out ? "

Halliday caught his hand.

" I can't say it, you know ; but it must be rotten to be dead. Good-night, old boy ! "

Stirred and moved, Ashurst squeezed the hand, and went downstairs. The hall door was still open, and he passed out on to the lawn before the Crescent. The stars were bright in a very dark blue sky, and by their light some lilacs had that mysterious colour of flowers by night which no one can describe. Ashurst pressed his face against a spray ; and before his closed eyes Megan started up, with the tiny brown spaniel pup against her breast. " I thought of a girl that I might have—you know. I was glad I hadn't got her on my mind ! " He jerked his head away from the lilac, and began pacing up and down over the grass, a grey

phantom coming to substance for a moment in the light from the lamp at either end. He was with her again under the living, breathing whiteness of the blossom, the stream chattering by, the moon glinting steel-blue on the bathing-pool; back in the rapture of his kisses on her upturned face of innocence and humble passion; back in the suspense and beauty of that pagan night. He stood still once more in the shadow of the lilacs. Here the sea, not the stream, was Night's voice; the sea with its sigh and rustle; no little bird, no owl, no night-jar called or spun; but a piano tinkled, and the white houses cut the sky with solid curve, and the scent from the lilacs filled the air. A window of the hotel, high up, was lighted; he saw a shadow move across the blind. And most queer sensations stirred within him, a sort of churning, and twining, and turning of a single emotion on itself, as though spring and love, bewildered and confused, seeking the way, were baffled. This girl, who had called him Frank, whose hand had given him that sudden little clutch, this girl so cool and pure—what would *she* think of such wild, unlawful living? He sank down on the grass, sitting there cross-legged, with his back to the house, motionless as some carved Buddha. Was he really going to break through innocence, and steal? Sniff the scent out of a wild flower, and—perhaps—throw it away? “Of a girl at Cambridge that I might have—you know!” He put his hands to the grass, one on each side, palms downwards, and pressed; it was just warm still—the grass, barely moist, soft and firm and friendly. ‘What am I going to do?’ he thought. Perhaps Megan was at her window, looking out at the blossom, thinking of him! Poor little Megan! ‘Why not?’ he thought. ‘I love her! But do I—really

love her? or do I only want her because she is so pretty, and loves me? What am I going to do!’ The piano tinkled on, the stars winked; and Ashurst gazed out before him at the dark sea, as if spell-bound. He got up at last, cramped and rather chilly. There was no longer light in any window. And he went in to bed.

8 §

Out of a deep and dreamless sleep he was awakened by the sound of thumping on the door. A shrill voice called :

“Hi! Breakfast’s ready.”

He jumped up. Where was he——? Ah!

He found them already eating marmalade, and sat down in the empty place between Stella and Sabina, who, after watching him a little, said :

“I say, do buck up; we’re going to start at half-past nine.”

“We’re going to Berry Head, old chap; you *must* come!”

Ashurst thought: ‘Come! Impossible. I shall be getting things and going back.’ He looked at Stella. She said quickly :

“Do come!”

Sabina chimed in :

“It’ll be no fun without you.”

Freda got up and stood behind his chair.

“You’ve got to come, or else I’ll pull your hair!”

Ashurst thought: ‘Well—one day more—to think it over! One day more!’ And he said :

“All right! You needn’t tweak my mane!”

“Hurrah!”

At the station he wrote a second telegram to the farm,

and then—tore it up; he could not have explained why. From Brixham they drove in a very little wagonette. There, squeezed between Sabina and Freda with his knees touching Stella's they played "Up Jenkins"; and the gloom he was feeling gave way to frolic. In this one day more to think it over, he did not want to think! They ran races, wrestled, paddled—for to-day nobody wanted to bathe—they sang catches, played games, and ate all they had brought. The little girls fell asleep against him on the way back, and his knees still touched Stella's in the wagonette. It seemed incredible that thirty hours ago he had never set eyes on any of those three flaxen heads. In the train he talked to Stella of poetry, discovering her favourites, and telling her his own with a pleasing sense of superiority; till suddenly she said, rather low:

"Phil says you don't believe in a future life, Frank. I think that's dreadful."

Disconcerted, Ashurst muttered:

"I don't either believe or not believe—I simply don't know."

She said quickly:

"I couldn't bear that. What would be the use of living?"

Watching the frown of those pretty oblique brows, Ashurst answered:

"I don't believe in believing things because one wants to."

"But why should one *wish* to live again, if one isn't going to?"

And she looked full at him.

He did not want to hurt her, but an itch to dominate pushed him on to say:

"While one's alive one naturally wants to go on

living for ever; that's part of being alive. But it probably isn't anything more."

"Don't you believe in the Bible at all, then?"

Ashurst thought: 'Now I shall really hurt her!'

"I believe in the sermon on the mount, because it's beautiful and good for all time."

"But don't you believe Christ was divine?"

He shook his head.

She turned her face quickly to the window, and there sprang into his mind Megan's prayer, repeated by little Nick: "God bless us all, and Mr. Ashes!" Who else would ever say a prayer for him, like her who at this moment must be waiting—waiting to see him come down the lane? And he thought suddenly: 'What a scoundrel I am!'

All that evening this thought kept coming back; but, as is not unusual, each time with less poignancy, till it seemed almost a matter of course to be a scoundrel. And—strange!—he did not know whether he was a scoundrel if he meant to go back to Megan, or if he did not mean to go back to her.

They played cards till the children were sent off to bed; then Stella went to the piano. From over on the window seat, where it was nearly dark, Ashurst watched her between the candles—that fair head on the long, white neck bending to the movement of her hands. She played fluently, without much expression; but what a picture she made, the faint golden radiance, a sort of angelic atmosphere—hovering about her! Who could have passionate thoughts or wild desires in the presence of that swaying, white-clothed girl with the seraphic head? She played a thing of Schumann's called "*Warum?*" Then Halliday brought out a flute, and the spell was broken. After this they made Ashurst

sing, Stella playing him accompaniments from a book of Schumann songs, till, in the middle of "*Ich grolle nicht*," two small figures clad in blue dressing-gowns crept in and tried to conceal themselves beneath the piano. The evening broke up in confusion, and what Sabina called "a splendid rag."

That night Ashurst hardly slept at all. He was thinking, tossing and turning. The intense domestic intimacy of these last two days, the strength of this Halliday atmosphere, seemed to ring him round, and make the farm and Megan—even Megan—seem unreal. Had he really made love to her—really promised to take her away to live with him? He must have been bewitched by the spring, the night, the apple blossom! This May madness could but destroy them both! The notion that he was going to make her his mistress—that simple child not yet eighteen—now filled him with a sort of horror, even while it still stung and whipped his blood. He muttered to himself: "It's awful, what I've done—awful!" And the sound of Schumann's music throbbed and mingled with his fevered thoughts, and he saw again Stella's cool, white, fair-haired figure and bending neck, the queer, angelic radiance about her. 'I must have been—I must be—mad!' he thought. 'What came into me? Poor little Megan!' "God bless us all, and Mr. Ashes!" "I want to be with you—only to be with you!" And burying his face in his pillow, he smothered down a fit of sobbing. Not to go back was awful! To go back—more awful still!

Emotion, when you are young, and give real vent to it, loses its power of torture. And he fell asleep, thinking: 'What was it—a few kisses—all forgotten in a month!'

Next morning he got his cheque cashed, but avoided

the shop of the dove-grey dress like the plague; and, instead, bought himself some necessities. He spent the whole day in a queer mood, cherishing a kind of sullenness against himself. Instead of the hankering of the last two days, he felt nothing but a blank—all passionate longing gone, as if quenched in that outburst of tears. After tea Stella put a book down beside him, and said shyly :

“Have you read that, Frank?”

It was Farrar's *Life of Christ*. Ashurst smiled. Her anxiety about his beliefs seemed to him comic, but touching. Infectious, too, perhaps, for he began to have an itch to justify himself, if not to convert her. and in the evening, when the children and Halliday were mending their shrimping nets, he said :

“At the back of orthodox religion, so far as I can see, there's always the idea of reward—what you can get for being good; a kind of begging for favours. I think it all starts in fear.”

She was sitting on the sofa making reefer knots with a bit of string. She looked up quickly :

“I think it is much deeper than that.”

Ashurst felt again that wish to dominate.

“You think so,” he said; “but wanting the ‘*quid pro quo*’ is about the deepest thing in all of us! It's jolly hard to get to the bottom of it!”

She wrinkled her brows in a puzzled frown.

“I don't think I understand.”

He went on obstinately :

“Well, think, and see if the most religious people aren't those who feel that this life doesn't give them all they want. I believe in being good because to be good is good in itself.”

“Then you do believe in being good?”

How pretty she looked now—it was easy to be good with her! And he nodded and said:

“I say, show me how to make that knot!”

- With her fingers touching his, in manœuvring the bit of string he felt soothed and happy. And when he went to bed he wilfully kept his thoughts on her, wrapping himself in her fair, cool sisterly radiance, as in some garment of protection.

Next day he found they had arranged to go by train to Totnes, and picnic at Berry Pomeroy Castle. Still in that resolute oblivion of the past, he took his place with them in the landau beside Halliday, back to the horses. And, then, along the sea front, nearly at the turning into the railway station, his heart almost leaped into his mouth. Megan—Megan herself!—was walking on the far pathway, in her old skirt and jacket and her tam-o'-shanter, looking up into the faces of the passers-by. Instinctively he threw his hand up for cover, then made a feint of clearing dust out of his eyes; but between his fingers he could see her still, moving, not with her free country step, but wavering, lost-looking, pitiful—like some little dog which had missed its master and does not know whether to run on, to run back—where to run. How had she come like this?—what excuse had she found to get away?—what did she hope for? But with every turn of the wheels bearing him away from her, his heart revolted and cried to him to stop them, to get out, and go to her! When the landau turned the corner to the station he could stand it no more, and opening the carriage door, muttered: “I’ve forgotten something! Go on—don’t wait for me! I’ll join you at the castle by the next train!” He jumped, stumbled, spun round, recovered his balance, and walked forward,

while the carriage with the astonished Hallidays rolled on.

From the corner he could only just see Megan, a long way ahead now. He ran a few steps, checked himself, and dropped into a walk. With each step nearer to her, further from the Hallidays, he walked more and more slowly. How did it alter anything—this sight of her? How make the going to her and that which must come of it, less ugly? For there was no hiding it—since he had met the Hallidays he had become gradually sure that he would not marry Megan. It would only be a wild love-time, a troubled, remorseful difficult time—and then—well, then he would get tired, just because she gave him everything, was so simple, and so trustful, so dewy. And dew—wears off! The little spot of faded colour, her tam-o' shanter cap, wavered on far in front of him; she was looking up into every face, and at the house windows. Had any man ever such a cruel moment to go through? Whatever he did, he felt he would be a beast. And he uttered a groan which made a nursemaid turn and stare. He saw Megan stop and lean against the sea-wall, looking at the sea; and he too stopped. Quite likely she had never seen the sea before, and even in her distress could not resist that sight. 'Yes—she's seen nothing,' he thought; 'everything's before her. And just for a few weeks' passion, I shall be cutting her life to ribbons. I'd better go and hang myself rather than do it!' And suddenly he seemed to see Stella's calm eyes looking into his, the wave of fluffy hair on her forehead stirred by the wind. Ah! it would be madness, would mean giving up all that he respected, and his own self-respect. He turned and walked quickly back towards the station. But memory of that poor, bewildered little figure, those

anxious eyes searching the passers-by, smote him too hard again, and once more he turned towards the sea. The cap was no longer visible ; that little spot of colour had vanished in the stream of the noon promenaders. And impelled by the passion of longing, the dearth which comes on one when life seems to be whirling something out of reach, he hurried forward. She was nowhere to be seen ; for half an hour he looked for her ; then on the beach flung himself face downward in the sand. To find her again he knew he had only to go to the station and wait till she returned from her fruitless quest, to take her train home ; or to take train himself and go back to the farm, so that she found him there when she returned. But he lay inert in the sand, among the indifferent groups of children with their spades and buckets. Pity at her little figure wandering, seeking, was well-nigh merged in the spring-running of his blood ; for it was all wild feeling now—the chivalrous part, what there had been of it, was gone. He wanted her again, wanted her kisses, her soft, little body, her abandonment, all her quick, warm, pagan emotion ; wanted the wonderful feeling of that night under the moonlit apple boughs ; wanted it all with a horrible intensity, as the faun wants the nymph. The quick chatter of the little bright trout-stream, the dazzle of the buttercups, the rocks of the old “ wild-men ” ; the calling of the cuckoos and yaffles, the hooting of the owls ; and the red moon peeping out of the velvet dark at the living whiteness of the blossom ; and her face just out of reach at the window, lost in its love-look ; and her heart against his, her lips answering his, under the apple-tree—all this besieged him. Yet he lay inert. What was it which struggled against pity and this feverish longing, and kept him there paralysed in

the warm sand? Three flaxen heads—a fair face with friendly blue-grey eyes, a slim hand pressing his, a quick voice speaking his name—"So you do believe in being good?" Yes, and a sort of atmosphere as of some old walled-in English garden, with pinks, and corn-flowers, and roses, and scents of lavender and lilac—cool and fair, untouched, almost holy—all that he had been brought up to feel was clean and good. And—suddenly he thought: 'She might come along the front again and see me!' and he got up and made his way to the rock at the far end of the beach. There, with the spray biting into his face, he could think more coolly. To go back to the farm and love Megan out in the woods, among the rocks, with everything around wild and fitting—that, he knew, was impossible, utterly. To transplant her to a great town, to keep, in some little flat or rooms, one who belonged so wholly to Nature—the poet in him shrank from it. His passion would be a mere sensuous revel, soon gone; in London, her very simplicity, her lack of all intellectual quality, would make her his secret plaything—nothing else. The longer he sat on the rock, with his feet dangling over a greenish pool from which the sea was ebbing, the more clearly he saw this; but it was as if her arms and all of her were slipping slowly, slowly down from him, into the pool, to be carried away out to sea; and her face looking up, her lost face with beseeching eyes, and dark, wet hair—possessed, haunted, tortured him! He got up at last, scaled the low rock-cliff, and made his way down into a sheltered cove. Perhaps in the sea he could get back his control—lose this fever! And stripping off his clothes, he swam out. He wanted to tire himself so that nothing mattered, and swam recklessly, fast and far; then

suddenly, for no reason, felt afraid. Suppose he could not reach shore again—suppose the current set him out—or he got cramp, like Halliday! He turned to swim in. The red cliffs looked a long way off. If he were drowned they would find his clothes. The Hallidays would know; but Megan perhaps never—they took no newspaper at the farm. And Phil Halliday's words came back to him again: "A girl at Cambridge I might have—— Glad I haven't got her on my mind!" And in that moment of unreasoning fear he vowed he would not have her on his mind. Then his fear left him; he swam in easily enough, dried himself in the sun, and put on his clothes. His heart felt sore, but no longer ached; his body cool and refreshed.

When one is as young as Ashurst, pity is not a violent emotion. And, back in the Hallidays' sitting-room, eating a ravenous tea, he felt much like a man recovered from fever. Everything seemed new and clear; the tea, the buttered toast and jam tasted absurdly good; tobacco had never smelt so nice. And walking up and down the empty room, he stopped here and there to touch or look. He took up Stella's work-basket, fingered the cotton reels and a gaily-coloured plait of sewing silks, smelt at the little bag filled with woodroffe she kept among them. He sat down at the piano, playing tunes with one finger, thinking: 'To-night she'll play; I shall watch her while she's playing; it does me good to watch her.' He took up the book, which still lay where she had placed it beside him, and tried to read. But Megan's little, sad figure began to come back at once, and he got up and leaned in the window, listening to the thrushes in the Crescent gardens, gazing at the sea, dreamy and blue below the trees. A servant came in and cleared the tea away, and he still stood, inhaling the

evening air, trying not to think. Then he saw the Hallidays coming through the gate of the Crescent, Stella a little in front of Phil and the children, with their baskets, and instinctively he drew back. His heart, too sore and discomfited, shrank from this encounter, yet wanted its friendly solace—bore a grudge against his influence, yet craved its cool innocence, and the pleasure of watching Stella's face. From against the wall behind the piano he saw her come in and stand looking a little blank as though disappointed; then she saw him and smiled, a swift, brilliant smile which warmed yet irritated Ashurst.

"You never came after us, Frank."

"No; I found I couldn't."

"Look! We picked such lovely late violets!" She held out a bunch. Ashurst put his nose to them, and there stirred within him vague longings, chilled instantly by a vision of Megan's anxious face lifted to the faces of the passers-by.

He said shortly: "How jolly!" and turned away. He went up to his room, and, avoiding the children, who were coming up the stairs, threw himself on his bed, and lay there with his arms crossed over his face. Now that he felt the die really cast, and Megan given up, he hated himself, and almost hated the Hallidays and that atmosphere of healthy, happy English homes. Why should they have chanced here, to drive away first love—to show him that he was going to be no better than a common seducer? What right had Stella, with her fair, shy beauty, to make him know for certain that he would never marry Megan; and, tarnishing it all, bring him such bitterness of regretful longing and such pity? Megan would be back by now, worn out by her miserable seeking—poor little thing!—expecting

perhaps to find him there when she reached home. Ashurst bit at his sleeve, to stifle a groan of remorseful longing. He went to dinner glum and silent, and his mood threw a dinge even over the children. It was a melancholy, rather ill-tempered evening, for they were all tired; several times he caught Stella looking at him with a hurt, puzzled expression, and this pleased his evil mood. He slept miserably; got up quite early, and wandered out. He went down to the beach. Alone there with the serene, the blue, the sunlit sea, his heart relaxed a little. Conceited fool—to think that Megan would take it so hard! In a week or two she would almost have forgotten! And he—well, he would have the reward of virtue! A good young man! If Stella knew, she would give him her blessing for resisting that devil she believed in; and he uttered a hard laugh. But slowly the peace and beauty of sea and sky, the flight of the lonely seagulls, made him feel ashamed. He bathed, and turned homewards.

In the Crescent gardens Stella herself was sitting on a camp stool, sketching. He stole up close behind. How fair and pretty she was, bent diligently, holding up her brush, measuring, wrinkling her brows.

He said gently:

“Sorry I was such a beast last night, Stella.”

She turned round, startled, flushed very pink, and said in her quick way:

“It’s all right. I knew there was something. Between friends it doesn’t matter, does it?”

Ashurst answered:

“Between friends—and we are, aren’t we?”

She looked up at him, nodded vehemently, and her upper teeth gleamed again in that swift, brilliant smile.

Three days later he went back to London, travelling

with the Hallidays. He had not written to the farm. What was there he could say?

On the last day of April in the following year he and Stella were married. . . .

Such were Ashurst's memories, sitting against the wall among the gorse, on his silver-wedding day. At this very spot, where he had laid out the lunch, Megan must have stood outlined against the sky when he had first caught sight of her. Of all queer coincidences! And there moved in him a longing to go down and see again the farm and the orchard, and the meadow of the gipsy bogle. It would not take long; Stella would be an hour yet, perhaps.

"How well he remembered it all—the little crowning group of pine trees, the steep-up grass hill behind! He paused at the farm gate. The low stone house, the yew-tree porch, the flowering currants—not changed a bit; even the old green chair was out there on the grass under the window, where he had reached up to her that night to take the key. Then he turned down the lane, and stood leaning on the orchard gate—grey skeleton of a gate, as then. A black pig even was wandering in there among the trees. Was it true that twenty-six years had passed, or had he dreamed and awakened to find Megan waiting for him by the big apple-tree? Unconsciously he put up his hand to his grizzled beard and brought himself back to reality. Opening the gate, he made his way down through the docks and nettles till he came to the edge, and the old apple-tree itself. Unchanged! A little more of the grey-lichen, a dead branch or two, and for the rest it might have been only last night that he had embraced that mossy trunk after Megan's flight and inhaled its woody savour, while

above his head the moonlit blossom had seemed to breathe and live. In that early spring a few buds were showing already; the blackbirds shouting their songs, a cuckoo calling, the sunlight bright and warm. Incredibly the same—the chattering trout-stream, the narrow pool he had lain in every morning, splashing the water over his flanks and chest; and out there in the wild meadow the beech clump and the stone where the gipsy bogle was supposed to sit. And an ache for lost youth, a hankering, a sense of wasted love and sweetness, gripped Ashurst by the throat. Surely, on this earth of such wild beauty, one was meant to hold rapture to one's heart, as this earth and sky held it! And yet, one could not!

He went to the edge of the stream, and looking down at the little pool, thought: 'Youth and spring! What has become of them all I wonder?' And then, in sudden fear of having this memory jarred by human encounter, he went back to the lane, and pensively retraced his steps to the cross-roads.

Beside the car an old, grey-bearded labourer was leaning on a stick, talking to the chauffeur. He broke off at once, as though guilty of disrespect, and touching his hat, prepared to limp on down the lane.

Ashurst pointed to the narrow green mound. "Can you tell me what this is?"

The old fellow stopped; on his face had come a look as though he were thinking: 'You've come to the right shop, mister!'

"'Tis a grave," he said.

"But why out here?"

The old man smiled. "That's a tale, as yu may say. An' not the first time as I've a-told et—there's plenty

folks asks 'bout that bit o' turf. 'Maid's Grave' us calls et, 'ereabouts."

Ashurst held out his pouch. "Have a fill?"

The old man touched his hat again, and slowly filled an old clay pipe. His eyes, looking upward out of a mass of wrinkles and hair, were still quite bright.

"If yu don' mind, zurr, I'll zet down—my leg's 'urtin' a bit to-day." And he sat down on the mound of turf.

"There's always a vlower on this grave. An 'tain't so very lonesome, neither; brave lot o' folks goes by now, in they new motor cars an' things—not as 'twas in th' old days. She've a-got company up 'ere. 'Twas a poor soul killed 'erself."

"I see!" said Ashurst. "Cross-roads burial. I didn't know that custom was kept up."

"Ah! but 'twas a main long time ago. Us 'ad a parson as was very God-fearin' then. Let me see, I've a 'ad my pension six year come Michaelmas, an' I were just on fifty when t'appened. There's none livin' knows more about et than what I du. She belonged close 'ere; same farm as where I used to work along o' Mrs. Narracombe—'tes Nick Narracombe's now; I dus a bit for 'im still, odd times."

Ashurst, who was leaning against the gate, lighting his pipe, left his curved hands before his face for long after the flame of the match had gone out.

"Yes!" he said, and to himself his voice sounded hoarse and queer.

"She was one in an 'underd, poor maid! I putts a vlower 'ere every time I passes. Pretty maid an' gude maid she was, though they wouldn't burry 'er up tu th' church, nor where she wanted to be burried neither." The old labourer paused, and put his hairy, twisted hand flat down on the turf beside the bluebells.

"Yes?" said Ashurst.

"In a manner of speakin'," the old man went on, "I think as 'twas a love-story—though there's no one never knu for zartin. Yu can't tell what's in a maid's 'ead—but that's wot I think about it." He drew his hand along the turf. "I was fond o' that maid—don' know as there was anyone as wasn't fond of 'er. But she was tu lovin'-'carted—that's where 'twas, I think." He looked up. And Ashurst, whose lips were trembling in the cover of his beard, murmured again: "Yes?"

"'Twas in the spring, 'bout now as 't might be, or a little later—blossom time—an' we 'ad one o' they young college gentlemen stayin' at the farm—nice feller tu, with 'is 'ead in the air. I liked 'e very well, and I never see nothin' between 'em, but to my thinkin' 'e turned the maid's fancy." The old man took the pipe out of his mouth, spat, and went on:

"Yu see, 'e went away sudden one day, an' never come back. They got 'is knapsack and bits o' things down there still. That's what stuck in my mind—'is never sendin' for 'em. 'Is name was Ashes, or somethen' like that."

"Yes?" said Ashurst once more.

The old man licked his lips.

"'Er never said nothin', but from that day 'er went kind of dazed lukin'; didn' seem rightly thefr at all. I never knu a 'uman creature so changed in me life—never. There was another young feller at the farm—Joe Biddaford 'is name wer', that was praaperly sweet on 'er, tu; I guess 'e used to plague 'er wi' 'is attentions. She got to luke quite wild. I'd zee her sometimes of an avenin' when I was bringin' up the calves; ther' she'd stand in th' orchard, under the big apple-tree,

lukin' straight before 'er. 'Well,' I used t'think, 'I dunno what 'tes that's the matter wi' yu,' but yu'm lukin' pittiful, that yu be!'"

The old man relit his pipe and sucked at it reflectively. "Yes?" said Ashurst.

"I remembers one day I said to 'er: 'What's the matter, Megan?'—'er name was Megan David, she come from Wales same as 'er aunt, ol' Missis Narracombe. 'Yu'm frettin' about somethin,' I says. 'No, Jim,' she says, 'I'm not frettin'.' 'Yes, yu be!' I says. 'No,' she says, and tu tears cam' rollin' out. 'Yu'm cryin'—what's that, then?' I says. She putts 'er 'and over 'er 'eart: 'It 'urts me,' she says; 'but 'twill sune be better,' she says. 'But if anything shude 'appen to me, Jim, I wants to be burried under this 'ere apple-tree.' I laughed. 'What's goin' to 'appen to yu?' I says: 'don't 'ee be fulish.' 'No,' she says, 'I won't be fulish.' Well, I know what maids are, an' I never thought no more about et, till tu days arter that, 'bout six in the avenin' I was comin' up wi' the calves, when I see somethin' dark lyin' in the strame, close to that big apple-tree. I says to meself: 'Is that a pig—funny place for a pig to get to!' an' I goes up to et, an' I see what 'twas."

The old man stopped: his eyes, turned upward, had a bright, suffering, look.

"'Twas the maid, in a little narrer pool ther' that's made by the stoppin' of a rock—where I see the young gentleman bathin' once or twice. 'Er was lyin' on 'er face in the watter. There was a plant o' goldie-cups growin' out o' the stone just above 'er 'ead. An' when I come to luke at 'er face, 'twas luvly, butiful, so calm's a baby's—wonderful butiful et was. When the doctor saw 'er, 'e said: "'Er culdn't never a-done

it in that little bit o' watter ef 'er 'adn't a-been in an extarsy.' Ah! an' judgin' from 'er face, that was just 'ow she was. Et made me cry praaper—butiful et was! 'Twas June then, but she'd a-found a little bit of apple-blossom left over somewhere's, and stuck et in 'er 'air. That's why I thinks 'er must a-been in an extarsy, to go to et gay, like that. Why! there wasn't more than a fute and 'arrf o' watter. But I tell 'ee one thing—that meadder's 'arnted; I knu et, an' she knu et; an' no one'll persuade me as tesn't. I told 'em what she said to me 'bout bein' burried under th'apple tree. But I think that turned 'em—made et luke tu much 's ef she'd 'ad it in 'er mind deliberate; an' so they burried 'er up 'ere. Parson we 'ad then was very particular, 'e was."

Again the old man drew his hand over the turf.

"'Tes wonderful, et seems," he added slowly, "what maids'll du for love. She 'ad a lovin' 'cart; I guess 'twas broken. But us never *knu* nothin'!"

He looked up as if for approval of his story, but Ashurst had walked past him as if he were not there.

Up on the top of the hill, beyond where he had spread the lunch, over, out of sight, he lay down on his face. So had his virtue been rewarded, and "the Cyprian," goddess of love, taken her revenge! And before his eyes, dim with tears, came Megan's face with the sprig of apple-blossom in her dark wet hair. 'What did I do that was wrong?' he thought. 'What *did* I do?' But he could not answer. Spring, with its rush of passion, its flowers and song—the spring in his heart and Megan's! Was it just Love seeking a victim! The Greek was right, then—the words of the "Hippolytus" as true to-day!

*"For mad is her heart of Love,
And gold the gleam of his wing;
And all to the spell thereof
Bend when he makes his spring.
All life that is wild and young
In mountain and wave and stream,
All that of earth is sprung,
Or breathes in the red sunbeam;
Yea, and Mankind. O'er all a royal throne,
Cyprian, Cyprian, is thine alone!"*

The Greek was right! Megan! Poor little Megan—coming over the hill! Megan under the old apple-tree waiting and looking! Megan dead, with beauty printed on her! . . .

A voice said:

"Oh, there you are! Look!"

Ashurst rose, took his wife's sketch, and stared at it in silence.

"Is the foreground right, Frank?"

"Yes."

"But there's something wanting, isn't there?"

Ashurst nodded. Wanting? The apple-tree, the singing, and the gold!

1916.

THE PRISONER

ON a fine day of early summer in a London garden, before the birds had lost their spring song, or the trees dropped their last blossoms, our friend said suddenly :

"Why! there's a goldfinch!" Blackbirds there were, and thrushes, and tits in plenty, an owl at night, and a Christopher Columbus of a cuckoo, who solemnly, once a year, mistook this green island of trees for the main lands of Kent and Surrey, but a goldfinch—never!

"I hear it—over there!" he said again, and, getting up, he walked towards the house.

When he came back, our friend sat down again, and observed :

"I didn't know that you kept a cage-bird!" We admitted that our cook had a canary.

"A mule!" he remarked, very shortly.

Some strong feeling had evidently been aroused in him that neither of us could understand.

Suddenly he burst out :

"I can't bear things in cages ; animals, birds, or men. I hate to see or think of them." And looking at us angrily, as though we had taken an advantage in drawing from him this confession, he went on quickly :

"I was staying in a German town some years ago, with a friend who was making inquiries into social matters. He asked me one day to go over a prison with him. I had never seen one, then, and I agreed. It was just such a day as this—a perfectly clear sky, and

there was that cool, dancing sparkle on everything that you only see in some parts of Germany. This prison, which stood in the middle of the town, was one of those shaped like a star that have been built over there on the plan of Pentonville. The system, they told us, was the same that you might have seen working here many years ago. The Germans were then, and still, no doubt, are, infatuated with the idea of muring their prisoners up in complete solitude. But it was a new toy to them then, and they were enjoying it with that sort of fanatical thoroughness which the Germans give to everything they take up. I don't want to describe this prison, or what we saw in it ; as far as an institution run on such dreadful lines can be, it was, I daresay, well managed ; the Governor, at all events, impressed me favourably. I'll simply tell you of the one thing which I shall never forget, because it symbolised to me for ever the caging of all creatures, animal or human, great or small."

Our friend paused ; then, with an added irritation in his voice, as though aware of doing violence to his natural reserve, he went on :

" We had been all over the grizzly place when the Governor asked my friend whether he would like to see one or two of the ' life ' prisoners.

" ' I will show you one,' he said, ' who has been here twenty-seven years. He is, you will understand '—I remember his very words—' a little worn by his long confinement.' While we were going towards this prisoner's cell, they told us his story. He had been a cabinet-maker's assistant, and when still quite a boy joined a gang of burglars to rob his own employer. Surprised during the robbery, he had blindly struck out and killed his employer on the spot. He was sentenced to death, but, on the intervention of some

Royalty who had been upset by the sight of corpses, I believe at the Battle of Sadowa, his sentence was commuted to imprisonment for life.

"When we entered his cell he was standing perfectly still, gazing at his work. He looked quite sixty, though he could not have been more than forty-six—a bent, trembling ruin of a figure, covered by a drab-coloured apron. His face had the mealy hue and texture of all prisoners' faces. He seemed to have no features; his cheeks were hollow; his eyes large, but, looking back, I can't remember their colour—if, indeed, they had colour in them at all. As we passed in, one by one, through the iron door, he took off his round cap, drab-coloured too, like everything about him, showing his dusty, nearly bald head, with a few short grey hairs on end, and stood in an attitude of 'attention,' humbly staring at us. He was like an owl surprised by daylight. Have you ever seen a little child ill for the first time—full of bewilderment at its own suffering? His face was like that, but so extraordinarily gentle! We had seen many of the prisoners, and he was the only one that had that awful *gentleness*. The sound of his voice, too: '*Ja, Herr Direktor—nein, Herr Direktor!*' soft and despairing—I remember it now—there was not a breath of will-power left." Our friend paused, frowning in his effort to re-create the scene. "He held in his hand," he went on presently, "a sheet of stiff paper, on which he had been transcribing the New Testament in letters from a code of writing for the deaf and dumb. When he passed his thin fingers over the type to show us how easily the deaf and dumb could read it, you could see that his hands were dusty like a miller's. There was nothing in the cell to produce that dust, and in my belief it was not dust on his hands,

but some excretion from that human plant running to seed. When he held the sheet of paper up, too, it trembled like the wing of an insect. One of us asked who invented the system he was working at, mentioning some name. '*Nein, nein,*' he said, and he stood shivering with eagerness to recollect the right name. At last he drooped his head, and mumbled out: '*Ab, Herr Direktor, ich kann nicht!*' Then all of a sudden the name came bursting from his lips. At that moment, for the first time, he actually looked like a man. I never before then realised the value of freedom; the real meaning of our relations with other human beings; the necessity for the mind's being burnished from minute to minute by sights and sounds, by the need for remembering and using what we remember. This fellow, you see, had no use for memory in his life; he was like a plant placed where no dew can possibly fall on it. To watch that look pass over his face at the mere remembrance of a name was like catching sight of a tiny scrap of green leaf left in the heart of a withered shrub. Man, I tell you, is wonderful—the most enduring creature that has ever been produced!" Our friend rose and began pacing up and down. "His world was not a large one; about fourteen feet by eight. He'd lived in it for twenty-seven years, without a mouse even for a friend. They do things thoroughly in prisons. Think of the tremendous vital force that must go to the making of the human organism, for a man to live through that. . . . What do you imagine," he went on, turning to us suddenly, "kept even a remnant of his reason alive?—Well, I'll tell you: While we were still looking at his 'deaf and dumb' writing, he suddenly handed us a piece of wood about the size of a large photograph. It was the picture of a young

girl, seated in the very centre of a garden, with bright-coloured flowers in her hand ; in the background was a narrow, twisting stream with some rushes, and a queer bird, rather like a raven, standing on the bank. And by the side of the girl a tree with large hanging fruits, strangely symmetrical, unlike any tree that ever grew, yet with something in it that is in all trees—a look as if they had spirits, and were the friends of man. The girl was staring straight at us with perfectly round, blue eyes, and the flowers she held in her hand seemed also to stare at us. The whole picture, it appeared to me, was full of—what shall I say ?—a kind of wonder. It had all the crude colour and drawing of an early Italian painting, the same look of difficulty conquered by sheer devotion. One of us asked him if he had learnt to draw before his imprisonment, but the poor fellow misunderstood the question. ‘ *Nein, nein,*’ he said, ‘ the Herr Direktor knows I had no model. It is a fancy picture ! ’ And the smile he gave us would have made a devil weep ! He had put into that picture all that his soul longed for—woman, flowers, birds, trees, blue sky, running water ; and all the wonder of his spirit that he was cut off from them. He had been at work on it, they said, for eighteen years, destroying and repeating, until he had produced this, the hundredth version. It was a masterpiece. Yes, there he had been for twenty-seven years, condemned for life to this living death—without scent, sight, hearing, or touch of any natural object, without even the memory of them, evolving from his starved soul this vision of a young girl with eyes full of wonder, and flowers in her hand. It’s the greatest triumph of the human spirit, and the greatest testimony to the power of Art that I have ever seen.”

Our friend uttered a short laugh : “ So thick-skinned,

however, is a man's mind that I didn't even then grasp the agony of that man's life. But I did later. I happened to see his eyes as he was trying to answer some question of the Governor's about his health. To my dying day I shall never forget them. They were incarnate tragedy—all those eternities of solitude and silence he had lived through, all the eternities he had still to live through before they buried him in the graveyard outside, were staring out of them. They had more sheer pitiful misery in them than all the eyes put together of all the free men I've ever seen. I couldn't stand the sight of them, and hurried out of the cell. I felt then, and ever since, what they say the Russians feel—for all their lapses into savagery—the sacredness of suffering. I felt that we ought all of us to have bowed down before him; that I, though I was free and righteous, was a charlatan and sinner in the face of that living crucifixion. Whatever crime he had committed—I don't care what it was—that poor lost creature had been so sinned against that I was as dirt beneath his feet. When I think of him—there still, for I all know—I feel a sort of frenzy rising in me against my own kind. I feel the miserable aching of all the caged creatures in the world."

Our friend turned his head away, and for quite a minute did not speak. "On our way back, I remember," he said at last, "we drove through the Stadt Park. There it was free and light enough; every kind of tree—limes, copper beeches, oaks, sycamores, poplars, birches, and apple-trees in blossom, were giving out their scent; every branch and leaf was glistening with happiness. The place was full of birds, the symbols of freedom, fluttering about, singing their loudest in the sun. Yes, it was all enchanted ground.

And I well remember thinking that in the whole range of Nature only men and spiders torture other creatures in that long-drawn-out kind of way ; and only men do it in cold blood to their own species. So far as I know that's a fact of natural history ; and I can tell you that to see, once for all, as I did, in that man's eyes, its unutterable misery, is never to feel the same towards your own kind again. That night I sat in a *café* window, listening to the music, the talk, the laughter, watching the people pass in the street—shop-folk, soldiers, merchants, officials, priests, beggars, aristocrats, women of pleasure, and the light streaming out from the windows, and the leaves just moving against the most wonderful, dark blue sky. But I saw and heard nothing of it all. I only saw the gentle, mealy-coloured face of that poor fellow, his eyes, and his dusty, trembling hands, and I saw the picture that he had painted there in hell. I've seen it ever since, whenever I see or hear of any sort of solitary caged creature."

Our friend ceased speaking, and very soon after he rose, excused himself, and went away.

1909.

A SIMPLE TALE

TALKING of anti-Semitism one of those mornings, Ferrand said in his good French : “ Yes, *monsieur*, plenty of those gentlemen in these days esteem themselves Christian, but I have only once met a Christian who esteemed himself a Jew. *C’était tres drole—je vais vous conter cela.*

“ It was one autumn in London, and, the season being over, I was naturally in poverty, inhabiting a palace in Westminster at fourpence the night. In the next bed to me that time there was an old gentleman, so thin that one might truly say he was made of air. English, Scotch, Irish, Welsh—I shall never learn to distinguish those little differences in your race—but I well think he was English. Very feeble, very frail, white as paper, with a long grey beard, and caves in the cheeks, and speaking always softly, as if to a woman. . . . For me it was an experience to see an individual so gentle in a palace like that. His bed and bowl of broth he gained in sweeping out the kennels of all those sorts of types who come to sleep there every night. There he spent all his day long, going out only at ten hours and a half every night, and returning at midnight less one quarter. Since I had not much to do, it was always a pleasure for me to talk with him ; for, though he was certainly a little *toqué*,” and Ferrand tapped his temple, “ he had great charm of an old man, never thinking of himself no more than a fly that turns in dancing all day beneath a ceiling. If there was something he could do

for one of those specimens—to sew on a button, clean a pipe, catch beasts in their clothes, or sit to see they were not stolen, even to give up his place by the fire—he would always do it with his smile so white and gentle; and in his leisure he would read the Holy Book! He inspired in me a sort of affection—there are not too many old men so kind and gentle as that, even when they are ‘crackey,’ as you call it. Several times I have caught him in washing the feet of one of those sots, or bathing some black eye or other, such as they often catch—a man of a spiritual refinement really remarkable; in clothes also so refined that one sometimes saw his skin. Though he had never great thing to say, he heard you like an angel, and spoke evil of no one; but, seeing that he had no more vigour than a swallow, it piqued me much how he would go out like that every night in all the weathers at the same hour for so long a promenade of the streets. And when I interrogated him on this, he would only smile his smile of one not there, and did not seem to know very much of what I was talking. I said to myself: ‘There is something here to see, if I am not mistaken. One of these good days I shall be your guardian angel while you fly the night.’ For I am a connoisseur of strange things, *monsieur*, as you know; though, you may well imagine, being in the streets all day long between two boards of a sacred sandwich does not give you too strong a desire to *flâner* in the evenings. *Eh, bien!* It was a night in late October that I at last pursued him. He was not difficult to follow, seeing he had no more guile than an egg; passing first at his walk of an old shadow into your St. James’s Park along where your military types puff out their chests for the nursemaids to admire. Very slowly he went, leaning on a staff—*une canne de*

promenade such as I have never seen, nearly six feet high, with an end like a shepherd's crook or the handle of a sword, a thing truly to make the *gamins* laugh—even me it made to smile, though I am not too well accustomed to mock at age and poverty, to watch him march in leaning on that cane. I remember that night—very beautiful, the sky of a clear dark, the stars as bright as they can ever be in these towns of our high civilisation, and the leaf-shadows of the plane-trees, colour of grapes on the pavement, so that one had not the heart to put foot on them. One of those evenings when the spirit is light, and policemen a little dreamy and well-wishing. Well, as I tell you, my Old marched, never looking behind him, like a man who walks in sleep. By that big church—which, like all those places, had its air of coldness, far and ungrateful among us others, little human creatures who have built it—he passed, into the great Eaton Square, whose houses ought well to be inhabited by people very rich. There he crossed to lean him against the railings of the garden in the centre, very tranquil, his long white beard falling over hands joined on his staff, in awaiting what—I could not figure to myself at all. It was the hour when your high *bourgeoisie* return from the theatre in their carriages, whose manikins sit, the arms crossed, above horses fat as snails. And one would see through the window some lady *bercée doucement*, with the face of one who has eaten too much and loved too little. And gentlemen passed me, marching for a mouthful of fresh air, *très comme il faut*, their concertina hats pushed up, and nothing at all in their eyes. I remarked my Old, who, making no movement, watched them all as they went by, till presently a carriage stopped at a house nearly opposite. At once, then, he began to cross the road quickly,

carrying his great stick. I observed the lackey pulling the bell and opening the carriage door, and three people coming forth—a man, a woman, a young man. Very high *bourgeoisie*, some judge, knight, mayor—what do I know?—with his wife and son, mounting under the porch. My Old had come to the bottom of the steps, and spoke, in bending himself forward, as if supplicating. At once those three turned their faces, very astonished. Although I was very intrigued, I could not hear what he was saying, for, if I came nearer, I feared he would see me spying on him. Only the sound of his voice I heard, gentle as always; and his hand I saw wiping his forehead, as though he had carried something heavy from very far. Then the lady spoke to her husband, and went into the house, and the young son followed in lighting a cigarette. There rested only that good father of the family, with his grey whiskers and nose a little bent, carrying an expression as if my Old were making him ridiculous. He made a quick gesture, as though he said, 'Go!' then he too fled softly. The door was shut. At once the lackey mounted, the carriage drove away, and all was as if it had never been, except that my Old was standing there, quite still. But soon he came returning, carrying his staff as if it burdened him. And recoiling in a porch to see him pass I saw his visage full of dolour, of one overwhelmed with fatigue and grief; so that I felt my heart squeeze me. I must well confess, *monsieur*, I was a little shocked to see this old sainted father asking, as it seemed, for alms. That is a thing I myself have never done, not even in the greatest poverty—one is not like your 'gentlemen'—one does always some little thing for the money he receives, if it is only to show a drunken man where he lives. And

I returned in meditating deeply over this problem, which well seemed to me fit for the angels to examine ; and knowing what time my Old was always re-entering, I took care to be in my bed before him. He came in as ever, treading softly so as not to wake us others, and his face had again its serenity, a little ' crackey.' As you may well have remarked, *monsieur*, I am not one of those individuals who let everything grow under the nose without pulling them up to see how they are made. For me the greatest pleasure is to lift the skirts of life, to unveil what there is under the surface of things which are not always what they seem, as says your good little poet. For that one must have philosophy, and a certain industry, lacking to all those gentlemen who think they alone are industrious because they sit in chairs and blow into the telephone all day, in filling their pockets with money. Myself, I coin knowledge of the heart—it is the only gold they cannot take from you. So that night I lay awake. I was not content with what I had seen ; for I could not imagine why this old man, so unselfish, so like a saint in thinking ever of others, should go thus every night to beg, when he had always in this palace his bed, and that with which to keep his soul within his rags. Certainly we all have our vices, and gentlemen the most revered do, in secret, things they would cough to see others doing ; but that business of begging seemed scarcely in his character of an old altruist—for in my experience, *monsieur*, beggars are not less egoist than millionaires. As I say, it piqued me much, and I resolved to follow him again. The second night was of the most different. There was a great wind, and white clouds flying in the moonlight. He commenced his pilgrimage in passing by your House of Commons, as if toward the river. I like much

that great river of yours. There is in its career something of very grand; it ought to know many things, although it is so silent, and gives to no one the secrets which are confided to it. He had for objective, it seemed, that long row of houses very respectable, which gives on the Embankment, before you arrive at Chelsea. It was painful to see the poor Old, bending almost double against that great wind coming from the west. Not too many carriages down here, and few people—a true wilderness, lighted by tall lamps which threw no shadows, so clear was the moon. He took his part soon, as of the other night, standing on the far side of the road, watching for the return of some lion to his den. And presently I saw one coming, accompanied by three lionesses, all taller than himself. This one was bearded, and carried spectacles—a real head of learning; walking, too, with the step of a man who knows his world. Some professor—I said to myself—with his harem. They gained their house at fifty paces from my Old; and, while this learned one was opening the door, the three ladies lifted their noses in looking at the moon. A little of æsthetic, a little of science—as always with that type there! At once I had perceived my Old coming across, blown by the wind like a grey stalk of thistle; and his face, with its expression of infinite pain as if carrying the sufferings of the world. At the moment they see him those three ladies drop their noses and fly within the house as if he were the pestilence, in crying, ‘Henry!’ And out comes my *monsieur* again, in his beard and spectacles. For me, I would freely have given my ears to hear, but I saw that this good Henry had his eye on me, and I did not budge, for fear to seem in conspiracy. I heard him only say: ‘Impossible! Impossible! Go to the

proper place !' and he shut the door. My Old remained, with his long staff resting on a shoulder bent as if that stick were of lead. And presently he commenced to march again whence he had come, curved and trembling, the very shadow of a man, passing me, too, as if I were the air. That time also I regained my bed before him, in meditating very deeply, still more uncertain of the psychology of this affair, and resolved once again to follow him, saying to myself : ' This time I shall run all risks to hear.' There are two kinds of men in this world, *monsieur*—one who will not rest content till he has become master of all the toys that make a fat existence—in never looking to see of what they are made ; and the other, for whom life is tobacco and a crust of bread, and liberty to take all to pieces, so that his spirit may feel good within him. Frankly, I am of that kind. I rest never till I have found out why this is that ; for me mystery is the salt of life, and I must well eat of it. I put myself again, then, to following him the next night. This time he traversed those little dirty streets of your great Westminster where all is mixed in a true pudding of lords and poor wretches at two sous the dozen ; of cats and policemen ; kerosene flames, abbeys, and the odour of fried fish. Ah ! truly it is frightful to see your low streets in London ; that gives me a conviction of hopelessness such as I have never caught elsewhere ; piquant, too, to find them so near to that great House which sets example of good government to all the world. There is an irony so ferocious there, *monsieur*, that one can well hear the good God of your *bourgeois* laugh in every wheel that rolls, and the cry of each cabbage that is sold ; and see him smile in the smoky light of every flare, and in the candles of your cathedral, in saying to himself : ' I

have well made this world. Is there not variety here ? —*en voilà une bonne soupe !*’ This time, however, I attended my Old like his very shadow, and could hear him sighing as he marched, as if he also found the atmosphere of those streets too strong. But all of a sudden he turned a corner, and we were in the most quiet, most beautiful little street I have seen in all your London. It was of small, old houses, very regular, which made as if they inclined themselves in their two rows before a great church at the end, grey in the moonlight, like a mother. There was no one in the street, and no more cover than hair on the head of a pope. But I had some confidence now that my Old would not remark me standing there so close, since in these pilgrimages he seemed to remark nothing. Leaning on his staff, I tell you he had the air of an old bird in a desert, reposing on one leg by a dry pool, his soul looking for water. It gave me that notion one has sometimes in watching the rare spectacles of life—that sentiment which, according to me, pricks artists to their work. We had not stayed there too long before I saw a couple marching from the end of the street, and thought : ‘ Here they come to their nest.’ Vigorous and gay they were, young married ones, eager to get home ; one could see the white neck of the young wife, the white shirt of the young man, gleaming under their cloaks. I know them well, those young couples in great cities, without a care, taking all things, the world before them, *très amoureux*, without, as yet, children ; jolly and pathetic, having life still to learn—which, believe me, *monsieur*, is a sad enough affair for nine rabbits out of ten. They stopped at the house next to where I stood ; and, since my Old was coming fast as always to the feast, I put myself at once to the appear-

ance of ringing the bell of the house before me. This time I had well the chance of hearing. I could see, too, the faces of all three, because I have by now the habit of seeing out of the back hair. The pigeons were so anxious to get to their nest that my Old had only the time to speak, as they were in train to vanish. 'Sir, let me rest in your doorway!' *Monsieur*, I have never seen a face so hopeless, so crippled with fatigue, yet so full of a gentle dignity as that of my Old while he spoke those words. It was as if something looked from his visage surpassing what belongs to us others, so mortal and so cynic as human life must well render all who dwell in this earthly paradise. He held his long staff upon one shoulder, and I had the idea, sinister enough that it was crushing his body of a spectre down into the pavement. I know not how the impression came, but it seemed to me that this devil of a stick had the nature of a heavy cross reposing on his shoulder; I had pain to prevent myself turning, to find if in truth 'I had them,' as your drunkards say. Then the young man called out: 'Here's a shilling for you, my friend!' But my Old did not budge, answering always: 'Sir, let me rest in your doorway!' As you may well imagine, *monsieur*, we were all in the silence of astonishment, I pulling away at my bell next door, which was not ringing, seeing I took care it did not; and those two young people regarding my Old with eyes round as moons, out of their pigeon-house, which I could well see was prettily feathered. Their hearts were making seesaw, I could tell; for at that age one is still impressionable. Then the girl put herself to whispering, and her husband said those two words of your young 'gentlemen,' 'Awfully sorry!' and put out his hand, which held now a coin large as a saucer. But again

my Old only said : ' Sir, let me rest in your doorway ! ' And the young man drew back his hand quickly as if he were ashamed, and saying again, ' Sorry ! ' he shut the door. I have heard many sighs in my time—they are the good little accompaniments to the song we sing, we others who are in poverty ; but the sigh my Old pushed then—how can I tell you ?—had an accent as if it came from Her, the faithful companion, who marches in holding the hands of men and women so that they may never make the grand mistake to imagine themselves for a moment the good God. Yes, *mohsieur*, it was as if pushed by Suffering herself, that bird of the night, never tired of flying in this world where they talk always of cutting her wings. Then I took my resolution, and, coming gently from behind, said : ' My Old—what is it ? Can I do anything for you ? ' Without looking at me, he spoke as to himself : ' I shall never find one who will let me rest in his doorway. For my sin I shall wander for ever ! ' At this moment, *monsieur*, there came to me an inspiration so clear that I marvelled I had not already had it a long time before. He thought himself the Wandering Jew ! I had well found it. This was certainly his fixed idea, of a cracked old man ! And I said : ' My Jew, do you know this ? In doing what you do, you have become as Christ, in a world of wandering Jews ! ' But he did not seem to hear me, and only just as we arrived at our palace became again that old gentle being, thinking never of himself."

Behind the smoke of his cigarette a smile curled Ferrand's red lips under his long nose a little on one side.

" And, if you think of it, *monsieur*, it is well like that. Provided there exists always that good man of a Wandering Jew, he will certainly have become as Christ,

in all these centuries of being refused from door to door. Yes, yes, he must well have acquired charity the most profound that this world has ever seen, in watching the crushing virtue of others. All those gentry, of whom he asks night by night to let him rest in their doorways, they tell him where to go, how to *ménager* his life, even offer him money, as I had seen ; but, to let him rest, to trust him in their houses—this strange old man—as a fellow, a brother voyager—that they will not ; it is hardly in the character of good citizens in a Christian country. And, as I have indicated to you, this Old of mine, cracked as he was, thinking himself that Jew who refused rest to the good Christ, had become, in being refused for ever, the most Christ-like man I have ever encountered on this earth, which, according to me, is composed almost entirely of those who have themselves the character of the Wandering Jew.”

Puffing out a sigh of smoke, Ferrand added : “ I do not know whether he continued to pursue his idea, for I myself took the road next morning, and I have never seen him since.”

1914.

THE CONSUMMATION

ABOUT 1889 there lived in London a man named Harrison, of an amiable and perverse disposition. One morning, at Charing Cross Station, a lady in whom he was interested said to him :

" But Mr. Harrison, why don't you *write* ? You are just the person ! "

Harrison saw that he was, and at the end of two years had produced eleven short stories, with two of which he was not particularly pleased, but as he naturally did not like to waste them, he put them with the others and sent them all to a publisher. In the course of time he received from the publisher a letter saying that for a certain consideration or commission he would be prepared to undertake the risk of publishing these stories upon Harrison's incurring all the expenses. This pleased Harrison, who, feeling that no time should be wasted in making his " work " public, wrote desiring the publisher to put the matter in hand. The publisher replied to this with an estimate and an agreement, to which Harrison responded with a cheque. The publisher answered at once with a polite letter, suggesting that for Harrison's advantage a certain additional sum should be spent on advertisements. Harrison saw the point of this directly, and replied with another cheque—knowing that between gentlemen there could be no question of money.

In due time the book appeared. It was called " In the Track of the Stars," by Cuthbert Harrison ; and

within a fortnight Harrison began to receive reviews. He read them with an extraordinary pleasure, for they were full of discriminating flattery. One asked if he were a "Lancelot in disguise." Two Liberal papers described the stories as masterpieces; one compared them to the best things in Poe and de Maupassant; and another called him a second Rudyard Kipling. He was greatly encouraged, but, being by nature modest, he merely wrote to the publisher inquiring what he thought of a second edition. His publisher replied with an estimate, mentioning casually that he had already sold about four hundred copies. Harrison referred to his cheque-book and saw that the first edition had been a thousand copies. He replied, therefore, that he would wait. He waited, and at the end of six months wrote again. The publisher replied that he had now sold four hundred and three copies, but that, as Mr. Harrison had at present an unknown name, he did not advise a second edition: there was no market for short stories. These had, however, been so well received that he recommended Mr. Harrison to write a long story. The book was without doubt a success, so far as a book of short stories could ever be a success. . . . He sent Harrison a small cheque, and a large number of reviews which Harrison had already received.

Harrison decided not to have a second edition, but to rest upon his *succès d'estime*. All his relations were extremely pleased, and almost immediately he started writing his long story. Now it happened that among Harrison's friends was a man of genius, who sent Harrison a letter.

"I had no idea," he said, "that you could write like this; of course, my dear fellow, the stories are not 'done'; there is no doubt about it, they are *not* 'done.'"

But you have plenty of time ; you are young, and I see that you can do things. Come down here and let us have a talk about what you are at now."

- On receiving this Harrison wasted no time, but went down. The man of genius, over a jug of claret-cup, on a summer's afternoon, pointed out how the stories were not "done."

"They show a feeling for outside drama," said he, "but there is none of the real drama of psychology."

Harrison showed him his reviews. He left the man of genius on the following day with a certain sensation of soreness. In the course of a few weeks, however, the soreness wore off, and the words of the man of genius began to bear fruit, and at the end of two months Harrison wrote :

"You are quite right—the stories were not 'done.' I think, however, that I am now on the right path."

At the end of another year, after submitting it once or twice to the man of genius, he finished his second book, and called it "John Endacott." About this time he left off alluding to his "work" and began to call his writings "stuff."

He sent it to the publisher with the request that he would consider its publication on a royalty. In rather more than the ordinary course of time the publisher replied that in his opinion (a lay one) "John Endacott" didn't quite fulfil the remarkable promise of Mr. Harrison's first book ; and, to show Harrison his perfect honesty, he enclosed an extract from the "reader's" opinion, which stated that Mr. Harrison had "fallen between the stools of art and the British public." Much against the publisher's personal feelings, therefore, the publisher considered that he could only

undertake the risk in the then bad condition of trade—if Mr. Harrison would guarantee the expenses.

Harrison hardened his heart, and replied that he was not prepared to guarantee the expenses. Upon which the publisher returned his manuscript, saying that in his opinion (a lay one) Mr. Harrison was taking the wrong turning, which he (the publisher) greatly regretted, for he had much appreciated the pleasant relations which had always existed between them.

Harrison sent the book to a younger publisher, who accepted it on a postponed royalty. It appeared.

At the end of three weeks Harrison began to receive reviews. They were mixed. One complained that there was not enough plot; another, fortunately by the same post, that there was too much plot. The general tendency was to regret that the author of "In the Track of the Stars" had not fulfilled the hopes raised by his first book, in which he had shown such promise of completely hitting the public taste. This might have depressed Harrison had he not received a letter from the man of genius couched in these terms :

"My dear fellow, I am more pleased than I can say. I am now more than ever convinced that you can do things."

Harrison at once began a third book.

Owing to the unfortunate postponement of his royalty he did not receive anything from his second book. The publisher sold three hundred copies. During the period (eighteen months) that he was writing his third book the man of genius introduced Harrison to a critic, with the words : "You may rely on his judgment; the beggar is infallible."

While to the critic he said : "I tell you, this fellow can do things."

The critic was good to Harrison, who, as before said, was of an amiable disposition.

When he had finished his third book he dedicated it to the man of genius and called it "Summer."

"My dear fellow," wrote the man of genius, when he received his copy, "it is *good*! There is no more to be said about it; it *is* good! I read it with indescribable pleasure."

On the same day Harrison received a letter from the critic which contained the following: "Yes, it's undoubtedly an advance. It's not quite Art, but it's a great advance!"

Harrison was considerably encouraged. The same publisher brought out the book, and sold quite two hundred copies; but he wrote rather dolefully to Harrison, saying that the public demand seemed "almost exhausted." Recognising the fact that comparisons are odious, Harrison refrained from comparing the sale of the book with that of "In the Track of the Stars," in which he had shown such promise of "completely hitting the public taste." Indeed, about this time he began to have dreams of abandoning the sources of his private income and living the true literary life. He had not many reviews, and began his fourth book.

He was two years writing this "work," which he called "A Lost Man," and dedicated to the critic. He sent a presentation copy to the man of genius, from whom he received an almost immediate reply:

"My dear fellow, it is amazing, really amazing how you progress! Who would ever imagine you were the same man that wrote 'In the Track of the Stars'! Yet I pique myself on the fact that even in your first book I spotted that you could do things. Ah!—I wish I could write like you! 'A Lost Man' is wonderfully good."

The man of genius was quite sincere in these remarks, which he wrote after perusing the first six chapters. He never indeed, actually finished reading the book—he felt so tired, as if Harrison had exhausted him—but he always alluded to it as “wonderfully good,” just as if he really had finished it.

Harrison sent another copy to the critic, who wrote a genuinely warm letter, saying that he, Harrison, had “achieved” it at last. “This,” he said, “is *art*. I doubt if you will ever do anything better than this . . . I crown you.”

Harrison at once commenced his fifth book.

He was more than three years upon this new “work,” and called it “A Pilgrimage.” There was a good deal of difficulty in getting it published. Two days after it appeared, however, the critic wrote to Harrison: “I cannot tell you,” he said, “how very good I think your new book. It is perhaps stronger than ‘A Lost Man,’ perhaps more original. If anything it is too——! I have not finished it yet, but I’ve written off at once to let you know.”

As a matter of fact, he never finished the book. He could not—it was too——! “It’s wonderfully good,” he said, however, to his wife, and he made *her* read it.

Meanwhile the man of genius wired saying: “Am going to write to you about your book. Positively am, but have lumbago and cannot hold pen.”

Harrison never received any letter, but the critic received one saying: “Can you read it? I can’t. Altogether over ‘done.’”

Harrison was elated. His new publisher was not. He wrote in a peevish strain, saying there was *absolutely no sale*. Mr. Harrison must take care what he was doing or he would exhaust his public, and enclosing a solitary

review, which said amongst other things : " This book may be very fine art, too fine altogether. *We* found it dull."

Harrison went abroad, and began his sixth book. He named it " The Consummation," and worked at it in hermit-like solitude ; in it, for the first time, he satisfied himself. He wrote, as it were, with his heart's blood, with an almost bitter delight. And he often smiled to himself as he thought how with his first book he had so nearly hit the public taste ; and how of his fourth, the critic had said : " This is *art*. I doubt if you will ever do anything better than this." How far away they seemed ! Ah ! *this* book was indeed the " consummation " devoutly to be wished.

In the course of time he returned to England and took a cottage at Hampstead, and there he finished the book. The day after it was finished he took the manuscript and, going to a secluded spot on the top of the Heath, lay down on the grass to read it quietly through. He read three chapters, and, putting the remainder down, sat with his head buried in his hands.

" Yes," he thought, " *I have* done it at last. *It is good, wonderfully good !* " and for two hours he sat like that, with his head in his hands. He had indeed exhausted his public. It was *too good—he could not read it himself !*

Returning to his cottage, he placed the manuscript in a drawer. He never wrote another word.,

1904.

ACME

IN these days no man of genius need starve. The following story of my friend Bruce may be taken as proof of this assertion. Nearly sixty when I first knew him, he must have written already some fifteen books, which had earned him the reputation of "a genius" with the few who know. He used to live in York Street, Adelphi, where he had two rooms up the very shaky staircase of a house chiefly remarkable for the fact that its front door seemed always open. I suppose there never was a writer more indifferent to what people thought of him. He profoundly neglected the Press—not with one of those neglects which grow on writers from reading reviews of their own works—he seemed never to read criticism, but with the basic neglect of an "original," a nomadic spirit, a stranger in modern civilisation, who would leave his attics for long months of wandering, and come back there to hibernate and write a book. He was a tall, thin man, with a face rather like Mark Twain's, black eye-brows which bristled and shot up, a bitten, drooping grey moustache, and fuzzy grey hair; but his eyes were like owl's eyes, piercing, melancholy, dark brown, and gave to his rugged face an extraordinary expression of a spirit remote from the flesh which had captured it. He was a bachelor, who seemed to avoid women; perhaps they had "learned" him that; for he must have been very attractive to them.

The year of which I write had been to my friend Bruce

the devil, monetarily speaking. With his passion for writing that for which his Age had no taste—what could he expect? His last book had been a complete frost. He had undergone, too, an operation which had cost him much money and left him very weak. When I went to see him that October, I found him stretched out on two chairs, smoking the Brazilian cigarettes which he affected—and which always affected me, so black and strong they were, in their yellow maize-leaf coverings. He had a writing-pad on his knee, and sheets of paper scattered all around. The room had a very meagre look. I had not seen him for a year and more, but he looked up at me as if I'd been in yesterday.

"Hallo!" he said; "I went into a thing they call a cinema last night. Have you ever been?"

"Ever been? Do you know how long the cinema has been going? Since about 1900."

"Well! What a *thing*! I'm writing a skit on it!"

"How—a skit?"

"Parody—wildest yarn you ever read."

He took up a sheet of paper and began chuckling to himself.

"My heroine," he said, "is an Octoroon. Her eyes swim, and her lovely bosom heaves. Everybody wants her, and she's more virtuous than words can say. The situations she doesn't succumb to would freeze your blood; they'd roast your marrow. She has a perfect devil of a brother, with whom she was brought up and who knows her deep dark secret and wants to trade her off to a millionaire who also has a deep dark secret. Altogether there are four deep dark secrets in my yarn. It's a corker."

"What a waste of your time!" I said.

"My time!" he answered fiercely. "What's the use of my time? Nobody buys my books."

"Who's attending you?"

"Doctors! They take your money, that's all. I've got no money. Don't talk about me!" And again he took up a sheet of manuscript and chuckled.

"Last night—at that place—they had—good God!—a race between a train and a motor-car. Well, I've got one between a train, a motor-car, a flying machine, and a horse."

I sat up.

"May I have a look at your skit," I said, "when you've finished it?"

"It *is* finished. Wrote it straight off. D'you think I could stop and then go on again with a thing like that?" He gathered the sheets and held them out to me. "Take the thing—it's amused me to do it. The heroine's secret is that she isn't an Octoroon at all; she's a De La Casse—purest Creole blood of the South; and her villainous brother isn't her brother; and the bad millionaire isn't a millionaire; and her penniless lover is. It's rich, I tell you!"

"Thanks," I said drily, and took the sheets.

I went away concerned about my friend, his illness, and his poverty, especially his poverty, for I saw no end to it.

After dinner that evening I began languidly to read his skit. I had not read two pages of the thirty-five before I started up, sat down again, and feverishly read on. Skit! By George! He had written a perfect scenario—or, rather, that which wanted the merest professional touching-up to be perfect. I was excited. It was a little gold-mine if properly handled. Any good company, I felt convinced, would catch at it. Yes!

But how to handle it? Bruce was such an unaccountable creature, such a wild old bird! Imagine his having only just realised the cinema! If I told him his skit was a serious film, he would say: "Good God!" and put it in the fire, priceless though it was. And yet, how could I market it without *carte blanche*, and how get *carte blanche* without giving my discovery away? I was deathly keen on getting some money for him; and this thing, properly worked, might almost make him independent. I felt as if I had a priceless museum piece which a single stumble might shatter to fragments. The tone of his voice when he spoke of the cinema—"What a *thing*!" kept coming back to me. He was prickly proud, too—very difficult about money. Could I work it without telling him anything? I knew he never looked at a newspaper. But should I be justified in taking advantage of that—in getting the thing accepted and produced without his knowing? I revolved the question for hours, and went to see him again next day.

He was reading.

"Hallo! You again? What do you think of this theory—that the Egyptians derive from a Saharan civilisation?"

"I don't think," I said.

"It's nonsense. This fellow——"

I interrupted him.

"Do you want that skit back, or can I keep it?"

"Skit? What skit?"

"The thing you gave me yesterday."

"That? Light your fire with it. This fellow——"

"Yes," I said; "I'll light a fire with it. I see you're busy."

"Oh, no! I'm not," he said. "I've nothing to

do. What's the good of my writing? I earn less and less with every book that comes out. I'm dying of poverty."

"That's because you won't consider the public."

"How can I consider the public when I don't know what they want?"

"Because you won't take the trouble to find out. If I suggested a way to you of pleasing the public and making money, you'd kick me out of the room."

And the words: "For instance, I've got a little gold-mine of yours in my pocket," were on the tip of my tongue, but I choked them back. "Daren't risk it!" I thought. "He's given you the thing. *Carte blanche*—*—cartes serrées!*"

I took the gold-mine away and promptly rough-shaped it for the film. It was perfectly easy, without any alteration of the story. Then I was faced with the temptation to put his name to it. The point was this: If I took it to a film company as an authorless scenario, I should only get authorless terms; whereas, if I put his name to it, with a little talking I could double the terms at least. The film public didn't know his name, of course, but the inner literary public did, and it is wonderful how you can impress the market with the word "genius" judiciously used. It was too dangerous, however; and at last I hit on a middle course. I would take it to them with no name attached, but tell them it was by "a genius," and suggest that they could make capital out of the incognito. I knew they would feel it *was* by a genius.

I took it to an excellent company next day, with a covering note saying: "The author, a man of recognised literary genius, for certain reasons prefers to remain unknown." They took a fortnight in which

to rise, but they rose. They had to. The thing was too good in itself. For a week I played them over terms. Twice I delivered an ultimatum—twice they surrendered: they knew too well what they had got. I could have made a contract with £2,000 down which would have brought at least another £2,000 before the contract term closed; but I compounded for one that gave me £3,000 down, as likely to lead to less difficulty with Bruce. The terms were not a whit too good for what was really the “acme” of scenarios. If I could have been quite open, I could certainly have done better. Finally, however, I signed the contract, delivered the manuscript, and received a cheque for the price. I was elated, and at the same time knew that my troubles were just beginning. With Bruce’s feeling about the film, how the deuce should I get him to take the money? Could I go to his publishers, and conspire with them to trickle it out to him gradually as if it came from his books? That meant letting them into the secret; besides, he was too used to receiving practically nothing from his books; it would lead him to make an inquiry, and the secret was bound to come out. Could I get a lawyer to spring an inheritance on him? That would mean no end of lying and elaboration, even if a lawyer would consent. Should I send him the money in Bank of England notes, with the words: “From a’lifelong admirer of your genius”? I was afraid he would suspect a trick, or stolen notes, and go to the police to trace them. Or should I just go, put the cheque on the table, and tell him the truth?

The question worried me terribly, for I didn’t feel entitled to consult others who knew him. It was the sort of thing that, if talked over, would certainly leak

out. It was not desirable, however, to delay cashing a big cheque like that. Besides, they had started on the production. It happened to be a slack time, with a dearth of good films, so that they were rushing it on. And in the meantime there was Bruce—starved of everything he wanted, unable to get away for want of money, depressed about his health and his future. And yet so completely had he always seemed to me different, strange, superior to this civilisation of ours, that the idea of going to him and saying simply: "This is yours, for the film you wrote," scared me. I could hear his: "I? Write for the cinema? What do you mean?"

When I came to think of it, I had surely taken an extravagant liberty in marketing the thing without consulting him. I felt he would never forgive that, and my feeling towards him was so affectionate, even reverential, that I simply hated the idea of being cast out of his affections. At last I hit on a way that by introducing my own interest might break my fall. I cashed the cheque, lodged the money at my bank, drew my own cheque on it for the full amount, and armed with that and the contract, went to see him.

He was lying on two chairs, smoking his Brazilians, and playing with a stray cat which had attached itself to him. He seemed rather less prickly than usual, and after beating about the bushes of his health and other matters, I began;

"I've got a confession to make, Bruce."

"Confession!" he said. "What confession?"

"You remember that skit on the film you wrote, and gave me, about six weeks ago?"

"No."

"Yes, you do—about an Octoroon."

He chuckled. "Oh! Ah! That!"

I took a deep breath, and went on:

"Well, I sold it; and the price of course belongs to you."

"What? Who'd print a thing like that?"

"It isn't printed. It's been made into a film—super-film they call it."

His hand came to a pause on the cat's back, and he glared at me. I hastened on:

"I ought to have told you what I was doing, but you're so prickly, and you've got such confounded superior notions, I thought if I did, you'd be biting off your nose to spite your own face. The fact is, it made a marvellous scenario. Here's the contract, and here's a cheque on my bank for the price—£3,000. If you like to treat me as your agent, you owe me £300. I don't expect it, but I'm not proud, like you, and I shan't sneeze."

"Good God!" he said.

"Yes, I know. But it's all nonsense, Bruce. You can carry scruples to altogether too great length. Tainted source! Everything's tainted, if you come to that. The film's a quite justified expression of modern civilisation—a natural outcome of the Age. It gives amusement; it affords pleasure. It may be vulgar, it may be cheap, but we *are* vulgar, and we *are* cheap, and it's no use pretending we're not—not you, of course, Bruce, but people at large. A vulgar Age wants vulgar amusement, and if we can give it *that* amusement, we ought to; life's not too cheery, anyway."

The glare in his eyes was almost paralysing me, but I managed to stammer on:

"You live out of the world—you don't realise what humdrum people want; something to balance the

greyness, the—the banality of their lives. They want blood, thrill, sensation of all sorts. You didn't mean to give it them, but you have, you've done them a benefit, whether you wish to or not, and the money's yours and you've got to take it."

The cat suddenly jumped down; I waited for the storm to burst.

"I know," I dashed on, "that you hate and despise the film——"

Suddenly his voice boomed out:

"Bosh! What are you talking about? Film! I go there every other night."

It was my turn to say: "Good God!" And, ramming contract and cheque into his empty hand, I bolted, closely followed by the cat.

1923.

DEFEAT

SHE had been standing there on the pavement a quarter of an hour or so after her shilling's worth of concert. Women of her profession are not supposed to have redeeming points, especially when—like May Belinski, as she now preferred to dub herself—they are German; but this woman certainly had music in her soul. She often gave herself these "music baths" when the Promenade Concerts were on, and had just spent half her total wealth in listening to some Mozart and a Beethoven symphony.

She was feeling almost elated, full of divine sound, and of the summer moonlight that was filling the whole dark town. Women "of a certain type" have, at all events, emotions—and what a comfort that is, even to themselves! To stand just there had become rather a habit of hers. One could seem to be waiting for somebody coming out of the concert, not yet over—which, of course, was precisely what she *was* doing. One need not for ever be stealthily glancing and perpetually moving on in that peculiar way, which, while it satisfied the police and Mrs. Grundy, must not quite deceive others as to her business in life. She had only been "at it" long enough to have acquired a nervous dread of almost everything—not long enough to have passed through that dread to callousness. Some women take so much longer than others. And even for a woman "of a certain type" her position was exceptionally nerve-racking in war-time, going as she did by a false

name. Indeed, in all England there could hardly be a greater pariah than was this German woman of the night.

She idled outside a book-shop humming a little, pretending to read the titles of the books by moonlight, taking off and putting on one of her stained yellow gloves. Now and again she would move up as far as the posters outside the hall, scrutinising them as if interested in the future, then stroll back again. In her worn and discreet dark dress, and her small hat, she had nothing about her to rouse suspicion, unless it were the trail of violet powder she left on the moonlight.

For the moonlight this evening was almost solid, seeming with its cool still vibration to replace the very air; in it the war-time precautions against light seemed fantastic, like shading candles in a room still full of daylight. What lights there were had the effect of strokes and stipples of dim colour laid by a painter's brush on a background of ghostly whitish-blue. The dream-like quality of the town was perhaps enhanced for her eyes by the veil she was wearing—in daytime no longer white. As the music died out of her, elation also ebbed. Somebody had passed her, speaking German, and she was overwhelmed by a rush of nostalgia. On this moonlit night by the banks of the Rhine—whence she came—the orchards would be heavy with apples; there would be murmurs and sweet scents; the old castle would stand out clear, high over the woods and the chalky-white river. There would be singing far away, and the churning of a distant steamer's screw; and perhaps on the water a log raft still drifting down in the blue light. There would be German voices talking. And suddenly tears oozed up in her eyes, and rept down through the powder on her cheeks. She

raised her veil and dabbed at her face with a little, not-too-clean handkerchief, screwed up in her yellow-gloved hand. But the more she dabbed the more those treacherous tears ran. Then she became aware that a tall young man in khaki was also standing before the shop-window, not looking at the titles of the books, but eyeing her askance. His face was fresh and open, with a sort of kindly eagerness in his blue eyes. Mechanically she drooped her wet lashes, raised them obliquely, drooped them again, and uttered a little sob. . . .

This young man, captain in a certain regiment, and discharged from hospital at six o'clock that evening, had entered Queen's Hall at half-past seven. Still rather brittle and sore from his wound, he had treated himself to a seat in the grand circle, and there had sat, very still and dreamy, the whole concert through. It had been like eating after a long fast—something of the sensation Polar explorers must experience when they return to their first full meal. For he was of the New Army, and before the war had actually believed in music, art, and all that sort of thing. With a month's leave before him, he could afford to feel that life was extraordinarily joyful, his own experiences particularly wonderful; and, coming out into the moonlight, he had taken what can only be described as a great gulp of it, for he was a young man with a sense of beauty. When one has been long in the trenches, lain out wounded in a shell-hole twenty-four hours, and spent three months in hospital, beauty has such an edge of novelty, such a sharp sweetness, that it almost gives pain. And London at night is very beautiful. He strolled slowly towards the Circus, still drawing the moonlight deep into his lungs, his cap tilted up a little on his forehead in that moment of unmilitary abandonment; and whether he stopped

before the book-shop window because the girl's figure was in some sort a part of beauty, or because he saw that she was crying, he could not have made clear to anyone.

Then something—perhaps the scent of powder, perhaps the yellowg love, or the oblique flutter of the eyelids—told him that he was making what he would have called “a blooming error,” unless he wished for company, which had not been in his thoughts. But her sob affected him, and he said :

“What's the matter?”

Again her eyelids fluttered sideways, and she stammered :

“Not'ing. The beautiful evening—that's why!”

That a woman of what he now clearly saw to be “a certain type” should perceive what he himself had just been perceiving, struck him forcibly, and he said “Cheer up.”

She looked up again swiftly. “All right! But you are not lonelee like me.”

For one of that sort she looked somehow honest; her tear-streaked face was rather pretty, and he murmured :

“Well, let's walk a bit and talk it over.”

They turned the corner and walked east, along streets empty and beautiful, with their dulled orange-glowing lamps, and here and there the glint of some blue or violet light. He found it queer and rather exciting—for an adventure of just this kind he had never had. And he said doubtfully :

“How did you get into this? Isn't it an awfully hopeless life?”

“Ye-es, it ees——” her voice had a queer soft emphasis. “You are limping—haf you been wounded?”

"Just out of hospital."

"The horrible war—all the misery is because of the war. When will it end?"

He looked at her, and said:

"I say—what nationality are you?"

"Rooshian."

"Really! I never met a Russian girl."

He was conscious that she looked at him, then very quickly down. And he said suddenly:

"Is it as bad as they make out?"

She slipped her yellow-gloved hand through his arm.

"Not when I haf anyone as nice as you; I never haf yet, though"; she smiled—and her smile was like her speech, slow, confiding. "You stopped because I was sad; others stop because I am gay. I am not fond of men at all. When you know, you are not fond of them."

"Well! You hardly know them at their best, do you? You should see them at the front. By George! they're simply splendid—officers and men, every blessed soul. There's never been anything like it—just one long bit of jolly fine self-sacrifice; it's perfectly amazing."

Turning her blue-grey eyes on him, she answered:

"I expect you are not the last at that. You see in them what you haf in yourself, I think."

"Oh! not a bit—you're quite out. I assure you when we made the attack where I got wounded there wasn't a single man in my regiment who wasn't an absolute hero. The way they went in—never thinking of themselves—it was simply superb!"

Her teeth came down on her lower lip, and she answered in a queer voice: "It is the same too, perhaps, with—the enemy."

"Oh, yes, I know that."

"Ah! You are not a mean man. How I hate mean men!"

"Oh! they're not mean really—they simply don't understand."

"Oh! you are a baby—a good baby, aren't you?"

He did not quite like being called a baby, and frowned; but was at once touched by the disconcertion in her powdered face. How quickly she was scared!

She said clingingly:

"But I li-ike you for it. It is so good to find a ni-ice man."

This was worse, and he said abruptly:

"About being lonely? Haven't you any Russian friends?"

"Rooshian! No! The town is so beeg! Haf you been in the concert?"

"Yes."

"I, too—I love music."

"I suppose all Russians do."

She looked up at his face again, and seemed to struggle to keep silent; then she said quietly:

"I go there always when I haf the money."

"What! Are you so on the rocks?"

"Well, I haf just one shilling now." And she laughed.

The sound of that little laugh upset him—she had a way of making him feel sorry for her every time she spoke.

They had come by now to a narrow square, east of Gower Street.

"This is where I lif," she said, "Come in!"

He had one long moment of violent hesitation, then

yielded to the soft tugging of her hand, and followed. The passage-hall was dimly lighted, and they went upstairs into a front room, where the curtains were drawn, and the gas turned very low. Opposite the window were other curtains dividing off the rest of the apartment. As soon as the door was shut she put up her face and kissed him—evidently formula. What a room! It's green and beetroot colouring and the prevalence of cheap plush disagreeably affected him. Everything in it had that callous look of rooms which seem to be saying to their occupants: "You're here to-day and you'll be gone to-morrow." Everything except one little plant in a common pot, of maidenhair fern, fresh and green, looking as if it had been watered within the hour; in this room it had just the same unexpected touchingness that peeped out of the girl's matter-of-fact cynicism.

Taking off her hat she went towards the gas, but he said quickly:

"No, don't turn it up; let's have the window open and the moonlight in." He had a sudden dread of seeing anything plainly—it was stuffy too, and, pulling the curtains apart, he threw up the window. The girl had come obediently from the hearth, and sat down opposite him, leaning her arm on the window-sill and her chin on her hand. The moonlight caught her cheek where she had just renewed the powder, and her fair crinkly hair; it caught the plush of the furniture, and his own khaki, giving them all a touch of unreality.

"What's your name?" he said.

"May. Well, I call myself that. It's no good asking yours."

"You're a distrustful little soul, aren't you?"

"I have reason to be, don't you think?"

"Yes, I suppose you're bound to think us all brutes?"

"Well, I haf a lot of reasons to be afraid all my time. I am dreadfully nervous now; I am not trusting anybody. I suppose you haf been killing lots of Germans."

He laughed.

"We never know, unless it happens to be hand to hand. I haven't come in for that yet."

"But you would be very glad if you had killed some?"

"Glad? I don't think so. We're all in the same boat so far as that's concerned. We're not glad to kill each other. We do our job—that's all."

"Oh! it is frightful. I expect I haf my broders killed."

"Don't you get any news ever?"

"News! No indeed, no news of anybody in my country. I might not haf a country; all that I ever knew is gone—fader, moder, sisters, broders, all—never any more I shall see them, I suppose, now. The war it breaks and breaks—it breaks hearts." Her little teeth fastened again on her lower lip in that sort of pretty snarl. "Do you know what I was thinkin' when you came up? I was thinkin' of my native town and the river there in the moonlight. If I could see it again I would be glad. Were you ever home-seek?"

"Yes, I have been—in the trenches; but one's ashamed, with all the others."

"Ah! ye-es!" It came from her with a hiss. "Ye-es! You are all comrades there. What is it like for me here, do you think, where everybody hates and despises me, and would catch me, and put me in prison, perhaps?"

He could see her breast heaving with a quick breathing painful to listen to. He leaned forward, patting her knee, and murmuring : " So sorry."

• She said in a smothered voice :

" You are the first who has been kind to me for so long ! I will tell you the truth—I am not Rooshian at all—I am German."

Hearing that half-choked confession, his thought was : " Does she really think we fight against women ?" And he said :

" My dear girl, who cares ? "

Her eyes seemed to search right into him. She said slowly :

" Another man said that to me. But he was thinkin' of other things. You are a verree ni-ice boy. I am so glad I met you. You see the good in people, don't you ? That is the first thing in the world—because there is really not much good in people, you know."

He said, smiling :

" You're a dreadful little cynic ! " Then thought :
" Well—of course ! "

" Cyneec ? How long do you think I would live if I was not a cyneec ? I should drown myself to-morrow. Perhaps there are good people, but, you see, I don't know them."

" I know lots."

She leaned forward eagerly.

" Well now—see, ni-ice boy—you haf never been in a hole, haf you ? "

" I suppose not a real hole."

" No, I should think not, with your face. Well, suppose I am still a good girl, as I was once, you know, and you took me to some of your good people, and said :

'Here is a little German girl that has no work, and no money, and no friends.' Your good people they will say: 'Oh! how sad! A German girl!' and they will go and wash their hands."

Silence fell on him. He saw his mother, his sister, others—good people, he would swear! And yet——! He heard their voices, frank and clear; and they seemed to be talking of the Germans. If only she were not German as well!

"You see!" he heard her say, and could only mutter:

"I'm sure there *are* people."

"No. They would not take a German, even if she was good. Besides, I don't want to be good any more—I am not a humbug—I have learned to be bad. Aren't you going to kees me, ni-ice boy?"

She put her face close to his. Her eyes troubled him, but he drew back. He thought she would be offended or persistent, but she was neither; just looked at him fixedly with a curious inquiring stare; and he leaned against the window, deeply disturbed. It was as if all clear and simple enthusiasm had been suddenly knocked endways; as if a certain splendour of life that he had felt and seen of late had been dipped in cloud. Out there at the front, over here in hospital, life had been seeming so—as it were—heroic; and yet it held such mean and murky depths as well! The voices of his men, whom he had come to love like brothers, crude burring voices, cheery in trouble, making nothing of it; the voices of doctors and nurses, patient, quiet, reassuring voices; even his own voice, infected by it all, kept sounding in his ears. All wonderful somehow, and simple; and nothing mean about it anywhere! And now so suddenly to have lighted upon this, and all that was behind it—this

scared girl, this base, dark, thoughtless use of her. And the thought came to him: "I suppose my fellows wouldn't think twice about taking her on! Why, I'm not even certain of myself, if she insists!" And he turned his face and stared out at the moonlight. He heard her voice:

"Eesn't it light? No air-raid to-night. When the Zepps burned—what a horrible death! And all the people cheered—it is natural. Do you hate us verree much?"

He turned round and said sharply:

"Hate? I don't know."

"I don't hate even the English—I despise them. I despise my people too—perhaps more, because they began this war. Oh, yes! I know that. I despise all the peoples. Why haf they made the world so miserable—why haf they killed all our lives—hundreds and thousands and millions of lives—all for no'ting? They haf made a bad world—everybody hating, and looking for the worst everywhere. They haf made me bad, I know. I believe no more in anything. What is there to believe in? Is there a God? No! Once I was teaching little English children their prayers—isn't that funee? I was reading to them about Christ and love. I believed all those things. Now I believe not'ing at all—no one who is not a fool or liar can believe. I would like to work in a hospital; I would like to go and help poor boys like you. Because I am a German they would throw me out a hundred times, even if I was good. It is the same in Germany and France and Russia—everywhere. But do you think I will believe in love and Christ and a God and all that?—not I! I think we are animals—that's all! Oh! yes—you fancy it is because my life has spoiled me. It is not

that at all—that's not the worst thing in life. These man are not ni-ice, like you, but it's their nature, and," she laughed, " they help me to live, which is something for me, anyway. No, it is the men who think themselves great and good, and make the war with their talk and their hate, killing us all—killing all the boys like you, and keeping poor people in prison, and telling us to go on hating ; and all those dreadful cold-blooded creatures who write in the papers—the same in my country, just the same ; it is because of all them that I think we are only animals."

He got up, acutely miserable. He could see her following him with her eyes, and knew she was afraid she had driven him away. She said coaxingly : " Don't mind me talking, ni-ice boy. I don't know anyone to talk to. If you don't like it, I can be as quiet as a mouse.

He muttered :

" Oh ! go on, talk away. I'm not obliged to believe you, and I don't."

She was on her feet now, leaning against the wall, her dark dress and white face just touched by the slanting moonlight ; and her voice came again, slow and soft and bitter :

" Well, look here, ni-ice boy, what sort of a world is it, where millions are being tortured—horribly tortured, for no fault of theirs at all ? A beautiful world, isn't it ? 'Umbug ! silly rot, as you boys call it. You say it is all ' comrade ! ' and braveness out there at the front, and people don't think of themselves. Well, I don't think of myself verree much. What does it matter ? —I am lost now, anyway ; but I think of my people at home, how they suffer and grieve. I think of all the poor people there and here who lose those they love, and all the poor prisoners. Am I not to think of them ?

And if I do, how am I to believe it a beautiful world, ni-ice boy ? ”

He stood very still, biting his lips.

• “ Look here ! We haf one life each, and soon it is over. Well, I think that is lucky.”

He said resentfully :

“ No ! there’s more than that.”

“ Ah ! ” she went on softly, “ you think the war is fought for the future ; you are giving your lives for a better world, aren’t you ? ”

“ We must fight till we win,” he said between his teeth.

“ Till you win. My people think that too. All the peoples think that if they win the world will be better. But it will not, you know ; it will be much worse anyway.”

He turned away from her and caught up his cap ; but her voice followed him.

“ I don’t care which wins, I despise them all—animals—animals ! Ah ! Don’t go, ni-ice boy—I will be quiet now.”

He took some notes from his tunic pocket, put them on the table, and went up to her.

“ Good-night.”

She said plaintively :

“ Are you really going ? Don’t you like me enough ? ”

“ Yes, I like you.”

“ It is because I am German, then ? ”

“ No.”

“ Then why won’t you stay ? ”

He wanted to answer : “ Because you upset me so ” ; but he just shrugged his shoulders.

“ Won’t you kees me once ? ”

He bent, and put his lips to her forehead ; but as he took them away she threw her head back, pressed her mouth to his and clung to him.

He sat down suddenly, and said :

" Don't ! I don't want to feel a brute."

She laughed. " You are a funny boy, but you are verree good. Talk to me a little, then. No one talks to me. I would much rather talk, anyway. Tell me, haf you seen many German prisoners ? "

He sighed—from relief, or was it from regret ?

" A good many."

" Any from the Rhine ? "

" Yes, I think so."

" Were they very sad ? "

" Some were—some were quite glad to be taken."

" Did you ever see the Rhine ? Isn't it beautiful ? It will be wonderful to-night. The moonlight will be the same here as there ; in Rooshia too, and France, everywhere ; and the trees will look the same as here and people will meet under them and make love just as here. Oh ! isn't it stupid, the war ?—as if it was not good to be alive."

He wanted to say : " You can't tell how good it is to be alive till you're facing death, because you don't live till then. And when a whole lot of you feel like that—and are ready to give their lives for each other, it's worth all the rest of life put together." But he couldn't get it out to this girl who believed in nothing.

" How were you wounded, ni-ice boy ? "

" Attacking across open ground—four machine-gun bullets got me at one go off."

" Weren't you verree frightened when they ordered you to attack ? " No, he had not been frightened just then ! And he shook his head and laughed.

"It was great. We did laugh that morning. They got me much too soon, though—a swindle!"

She stared at him.

"You laughed?"

"Yes, and what do you think was the first thing I was conscious of next morning—my old colonel bending over me and giving me a squeeze of lemon. If you knew my colonel, you'd still believe in things. There *is* something, you know, behind all this evil. After all, you can only die once, and if it's for your country all the better."

Her face, with intent eyes just touched with dark, had in the moonlight a most strange, other-world look. Her lips moved:

"No, I believe in nothing. My heart is dead."

"You think so, but it isn't, you know, or you wouldn't have been crying when I met you."

"If it were not dead, do you think I could live my life—walking the streets every night pretending to like strange men—never hearing a kind word—never talking, for fear I will be known for a German. Soon I shall take to drinking, then I shall be '*kaput*' very quick. You see, I am practical; I see things clear. To-night I am a little emotional, the moon is funny, you know. But I live for myself only now. I don't care for anything or anybody."

"All the same, just now you were pitying your people and prisoners, and that."

"Yes, because they suffer. Those who suffer are like me—I pity myself, that's all; I am different from your English-women. I see what I am doing; I do not let my mind become a turnip just because I am no longer moral."

"Nor your heart either."

"Ni-ice boy, you are verree obstinate. But all that about love is 'umbug. We love ourselves, nothing more."

Again, at that intense soft bitterness in her voice, he felt stifled and got up, leaning on the window sill. The air out there was free from the smell of dust and stale perfume. He felt her fingers slip between his own, and stay unmoving. If she was so hard and cynical, why should he pity her? Yet he did. The touch of that hand within his own roused his protective instinct. She had poured out her heart to him—a perfect stranger! He pressed it a little, and felt her fingers crisp in answer. Poor little devil! This was a friendlier moment than she had known for years! And after all, fellow-feeling was bigger than principalities and powers! Fellow-feeling was all pervading as this moonlight, which she had said would be the same in Germany—as this white ghostly glamour wrapping the trees, making the orange lamps so quaint and decoratively useless out in the narrow square, where emptiness and silence reigned. He looked round into her face—in spite of kohl and powder, and the red salve on her lips, it had a queer, unholy, touching beauty. And he had suddenly the strangest feeling, as if they stood there—the two of them—proving that kindness, and human fellowship were stronger than lust, stronger than hate; proving it against meanness and brutality, and the sudden shouting of newspaper boys in some neighbouring streets, whose cries, passionately vehement, clashed into each other, and obscured the words—what was it they were calling? His head went up to listen; He felt her hand rigid within his arm—she too was listening. The cries came nearer, hoarser, more shrill and clamorous; the empty moonlight seemed of a

sudden crowded with figures, footsteps, voices, and a fierce distant cheering. "Great victory—great victory! Official! British! Severe defeat of the 'Uns! Many thousand prisoners!" So it sped by, intoxicating, filling him with a fearful joy; and leaning far out, he waved his cap and cheered like a madman; and the whole night seemed to him to flutter and vibrate and answer. Then he turned to rush down into the street, struck against something soft, and recoiled. The girl! She stood with hands clenched, her face convulsed, panting, and even in the madness of his joy he felt for her. To hear this—in the midst of enemies! All confused with the desire to do something, he stooped to take her hand; and the dusty reek of the tablecloth clung to his nostrils. She snatched away her fingers, swept up the notes he had put down, and held them out to him.

"Take them—I will not haf your English money—take them." And suddenly she tore them across twice, three times, let the bits flutter to the floor, and turned her back to him. He stood looking at her leaning against the plush-covered table which smelled of dust, her head down, a dark figure in a dark room with the moonlight sharpening her outline—hardly a moment he stayed, then made for the door. . . .

When he was gone, she still stood there, her chin on her breast—she who cared for nothing, believed in nothing—with the sound in her ears of cheering, of hurrying feet, and voices; stood in the centre of a pattern made by fragments of the torn-up notes, staring out into the moonlight, seeing, not this hated room and the hated square outside, but a German orchard, and herself, a little girl, plucking apples, a big dog beside her; a hundred other pictures, too, such

as the drowning see. Her heart swelled; she sank down on the floor, laid her forehead on the dusty carpet, and pressed her body to it.

She who did not care—who despised all peoples, even her own—began, mechanically, to sweep together the scattered fragments of the notes, assembling them with the dust into a little pile, as of fallen leaves, and dabbling in it with her fingers, while the tears ran down her cheeks. For her country she had torn them, her country in defeat! She, who had just one shilling in this great town of enemies, who wrung her stealthy living out of the embraces of her foes! And suddenly in the moonlight she sat up and began to sing with all her might—“*Die Wacht am Rhein.*”

1916.

VIRTUE

HAROLD MELLESH, minor clerk in an Accident Assurance Society, having occasion to be present at a certain Police Court to give evidence in the matter of a smashed car, stood riveted by manifestations of the law entirely new to him. His eyes, blue and rather like those of a baby, were opened very widely, his ingenuous forehead wrinkled, his curly hair was moving on his scalp, his fists involuntarily clenching his straw hat. He had seen four ladies of the town dealt with—three “jugged,” and one fined—before his sensations reached their climax. Perhaps she was prettier than the others, certainly younger, and she was crying.

“First time you’ve been here—two pounds, and ten shillings costs.”

“But I haven’t any money, sir.”

“Very well—fourteen days.”

Tears streaking the remains of powder—a queer little sound, and the sensations within young Mellesch simmered like a kettle coming to the boil. He touched a blue sleeve in front of him.

“Here,” he said, “I’ll pay her fine.”

He felt the glance of the policeman running over him like a chilly insect.

“Friend of yours?”

“No.”

“I shouldn’t, then. She’ll be here again within the month.”

The girl was passing, he saw the swallowing movement of her throat and said with desperation:

"I don't care. I'll pay it."

The policeman's glance crept about him clammily.

"Come with me, then."

Young Mellesch followed him out.

"Here," said his policeman to the one in charge of the girl, "this gentleman'll pay the fine."

Conscious of a confusion of glances, of his own cheeks reddening furiously, young Mellesch brought out his money—just two pounds fifteen; and, handing over the two pounds ten, he thought: "My hat! What would Alice say?"

He heard the girl's gasped out: "Ow! Thank you!" his policeman's muttered: "Waste o' money! Still, it was a kind action," and passed out into the street. Now that his feelings had given off that two pound ten's worth of steam he felt chilly and dazed, as if virtue had gone out of him. A voice behind him said:

"Thank you ever so much—it *was* kind of you."

Raising his straw hat he stood uncomfortably to let her pass.

She pushed a card into his hand. "Any time you're passing, I'll be glad to see you; I'm very grateful."

"Not at all!" With a smile, confused like her own, he turned off towards his office.

All day, among his accidents, he felt uncertain. Had he been a fool; had he been a hero? Sometimes he thought: "What brutes they are to those girls!" and sometimes: "Don't know; suppose they must do something about it." And he avoided considering how to explain the absence of two pounds ten shillings on which Alice had been reckoning. His soul was simple like the expression on his face.

He reached home at the usual hour—six-thirty.

His home was grey and small and had a little bit of green up Chalk Farm way, where the Tube made all things possible.

His wife, who had just put their baby daughter to bed, was sitting in the parlour darning his socks. She looked up—surely her forehead was rather like a knee!

“You wear your socks properly, Harold,” she said; “it’s all I can do to mend this pair.” Her eyes were china-blue, round like saucers; her voice had the monotony of one brought up to minimise emotion. A farmer’s daughter, young Mellesch had become engaged to her during a holiday in Somerset. Pale himself, from office and the heat, he thought how pale she looked.

“The heat’s dreadful, isn’t it?” she said. “Sometimes I wish we’d never had baby. It does tie you in the evenings. I *am* looking forward to Whitsuntide, that I am.”

Young Mellesch, tall and straggly, bent over and kissed her forehead. How on earth to let her know that he had “blewed” their holiday? He was realising that he had done an awful thing. Perhaps—oh! surely she would understand how he couldn’t sit and see that girl “jugged” before his eyes for want of it! But not until the end of their small supper did he say abruptly:

“I got quite upset this morning, Alice. Had to go down to the Police Court about that car smash I told you of, and afterwards I saw them run in a lot of those Piccadilly girls. It fair sickened me to see the way they treat them.”

His wife looked up; her face was childlike.

“Why, what do they do to them?”

“Quod them for speakin’ to men in the street.”

“I s’pose they’re up to no good.”

Irritated by the matter-of-factness in her voice, he went on :

" They speak to 'em as if they were dirt."

" Well, aren't they ? "

" They may be a loose lot, but so are men."

" Men wouldn't be so loose if they weren't there."

" I suppose it's what you call a vicious circle " ; and, pleased with his play on words, he added : " One or two of them were pretty."

His wife smiled ; her smile had a natural teasing quality.

" They treat *them* better, I suppose ? "

That was jolly cynical ! and he blurted out :

" One, quite young, never there before, they gave her a fortnight just because she hadn't any money—I couldn't stick it ; I paid her fine."

There was sweat on his forehead. His wife's face had gone quite pink.

" You paid ? How much ? "

He was on the point of saying : " Ten shillings." But something in his soul revolted. " Regular pill—two pound ten " ; and he thought glumly : " Oh ! what a fool I've been ! "

He did wish Alice wouldn't open her mouth like that, when nothing was coming out—made her look so silly ! Her face puckered suddenly, then became quite blank ; he was moved as if he had hit or pinched her.

" Awfully sorry, Alice," he muttered. " Never meant to—she—she cried."

" Course she cried ! You fool, Harold ! "

He got up, very much disturbed.

" Well, and what would *you* have done ? "

"Me? Let her stew in her own juice, of course. It wasn't your affair."

She too had risen. He thrust his fingers through his hair. The girl's face, tear-streaked, confusedly pretty, had come up before him, her soft common grateful voice tickled his ears again. His wife turned her back. So! he was in for a fit of sulks. Well! No doubt he had deserved it.

"I daresay I *was* a fool," he muttered, "but I did think you'd understand how I felt when I saw her cry. Suppose it had been you!" From the toss of her head, he knew he had said something pretty fatal.

"Oh! So that's what you think of me!"

He grasped her shoulder.

"Of course I don't, Alice, don't be so silly!"

She shook off his hand.

"Whose money was it? Now baby and me'll get no holiday. And all because you see a slut crying."

Before he could answer she was gone. He had an awful sense of having outraged justice. Given away her holiday—given his wife's holiday to a girl of the streets! Still, it was his own holiday, too; besides, he earned the money! He'd never wanted to give it to the girl; hadn't got anything for it! Suppose he'd put it into the offertory bag, would Alice have been in such a temper even if it was their holiday? He didn't see much difference. He sat down with knees apart, and elbows planted on them, staring at the peonies on the Brussels carpet paid for on the hire system. And all those feelings that rise in people who live together, when they don't agree, swirled in his curly head, and troubled his eyes, candid like a baby's. If they *would* treat the wretched girls like dirt! If only she hadn't cried! She hadn't meant to cry; he could tell that

by the sound of it. And who was the magistrate—he didn't look too like a saint; who was any man to treat her like that? Alice oughtn't—— No! But suddenly he saw Alice again bending over his socks—pale and tired with the heat—doing things for him or baby—and he had given away her holiday! No denying that! Compunction flooded him. He must go up and find her and try and make his peace—he would pawn his bicycle—she should have her holiday—oh! yes!

He opened the door and listened. The little house was ominously quiet—only the outside evening sounds from buses passing in the main road, from children playing on the doorsteps of the side street, from a man with a barrow of bananas. She must be up in the bedroom with baby! He mounted the steep white-washed stairway. It wanted a carpet, and fresh paint; ah! and a lot of other things Alice wanted—you couldn't have everything at once on four pound ten a week—with the price of living what it was. But she ought to have remembered there were things he wanted too—yes, precious bad, and never thought of getting. The door of their bedroom was locked; he rattled the handle. She opened suddenly, and stood facing him on the little landing.

"I don't want you up here."

"Look here, Alice—this is rotten."

She closed the door behind her.

"It is! You go down again, I don't want you. Think I believe that about crying! I'd be ashamed, if I were you!"

Ashamed! He might have been too soft, but why ashamed?

"Think I don't know what men are like? You can

just go to your rotten girl, if she's so pretty!" She stood hard and stiff against the door, with red spots in her cheeks. She almost made him feel a villain—such conviction in her body.

"Alice! Good Lord! You must be crazy! I've done nothing!"

"But you'd like to. Go along! I don't want you!"

The stabbing stare of her blue eyes, the muffled energy of her voice, the bitterness about her mouth, all made a fellow feel—well, that he knew nothing about anything—coming from one's wife like that! He leaned back against the wall.

"Well, I'm damned!" was all he could get out.

"D'you mean to say she didn't ask you?"

The insides of his hands grew wet. The girl's card in his pocket!

"Well, if you like to be a cat I can't help it. What d'you take me for?"

"Giving your own child's money to a dirty slut! You owed it—that's the truth—or will. Go on with you; don't stand there!"

He had a nasty longing to smite her on the mouth—it looked so bitter. "Well," he said slowly, "now I understand."

What was it that he understood? That she was all of a piece with something, with that Police Court, with the tone of the men's voices, with something unsparing, hard and righteous, which came down sharp on people?

"I thought—I think you might——" he stammered.

"Ugh!" The sound exasperated him so, that he turned to go downstairs.

"You whited sepulchre!"

The door clicked before he could answer the odd insult ; he heard the key turned. 'Idiotic ! The little landing seemed too small to hold his feelings. Would he ever have said a word to Alice, if he *had* done it. Why ! He had never even thought of doing anything !

Giddy from chagrin he ran downstairs, and, clawing his straw hat from the rack, went out. The streets were malodorous from London fog, fried fish, petrol, hot dirty people ; he strode along troubled, his eyes very rueful. So this was what he was really married to—this—this ! It was like being married to that Police Court ! It wasn't human—no, it wasn't—to be so suspicious and virtuous as all that ! What was the use of being decent and straight, if this was all you got for it ? Someone touched him on the shoulder.

"Mister, you're all white behind ; let me brush you."

He stood still confusedly, while a stout fair man smote his back up and down with a large flat hand. Whited sepulchre ! A bubble of rage rose to his lips. All right ! She should see ! He felt for the girl's card, and was suddenly amazed to find that he had no need to look at it—he remembered the address. Not far off, on the other side of the Euston Road ! That was funny—had he been looking at it without realising ? They said you had a subconscious mind. Well, what about it ? No, it was his conscious mind that was going to serve Alice out ! He had reached the Euston Road. Crossing it, he began to feel a queer pleasurable weakness in the legs. By this he knew that he was going to do wrong. He was not going to visit the girl just to serve his wife out, but because the prospect was—— ! That was bad—bad : it would put Alice in the right ! He stood still at the corner of a narrow square, with a strip of garden, and railings round it. He leaned

against those railings, his eyes searching the trees. He had always been quite straight with his wife—it was she who had put the idea into his head. And yet his legs being pleasantly weak seemed in an odd way to excuse her. It was like his doubt whether they hadn't to do something about it at the Police Court. Barring Alice—barring the Police Court—where would he—would any man be? Without virtue, entirely without virtue. A pigeon in the garden cooed. "Any time you're passing, I'll be glad to see you." It had sounded genuine—really grateful. And the girl had looked—not worse than anybody else! If Alice had been sympathetic about it he would never have thought of the girl again; that is—well——! The doubt set his legs in motion. He was a married man, and that was all about it. But he looked across at the numbers on the houses. Twenty-seven! Yes, there it was! A bloom of lilac brushed his face. The scent jerked him suddenly back to the farm in Somerset, and he and Alice courting. Alice—not the Alice on the landing! He scrutinised the shabby house, and suddenly went hot all over. Suppose he went in there—what would that girl think? That he had paid her fine because——! But that wasn't it at all—oh! no—he wasn't a squirt like that! He turned his face away, and walked on fast and far.

The signs were lit above the theatres; traffic was scanty, the streets a long dawdle of what vehicles and humans were about. He came to Leicester Square and sat down on a bench. The lights all round him brightened slowly under the dusk—theatre lights, street lamps. And the pity of things smote him, sitting there. So much of everything; and one got so little of anything! Adding figures up all day, going home

to Alice—that was life ! Well ; it wasn't so bad when Alice was nice to him. But—Crikey !—What one missed ! That book about the South Sea Islands—places, peoples, sights, sounds, scents, all over the world ! Four pounds ten a week, a wife, a baby ! Well, you couldn't have things both ways—but had he got them either way ? Not with the Alice on the landing !

Ah ! Well ! Poor Alice ; jolly hard on her to miss her holiday ! But she might have given him the chance to tell her that he would pawn his bicycle. Or was it all a bad dream ? Had he ever really been in that Police Court, seen them herding those girls to prison—girls who did what they did because—well, like himself, they had missed too much. They'd catch a fresh lot to-night. What a fool he'd been to pay that fine !

"Glad I didn't go into that girl's house, anyway," he thought. "I would have felt a scum !" The only decent thing about it all had been her look when she said : "Ow ! thank you !" That gave him a little feeling of warmth even now ; and then—it, too, chilled away. Nothing for it ! When he had done sitting there, he must go home ! If Alice had thought him a wrong-un before, what would she think when he returned ? Well, there it was ! The milk was spilt ! But he did wish she hadn't got such a virtue on her.

The sky deepened and darkened, the lights stared white ; the Square Garden with its flower-beds seemed all cut out and stiff, like scenery on a stage. Must go back and "stick" it ! No good to worry !

He got up from the bench and gave himself a shake. His eyes, turned towards the lights of the Alhambra, were round, candid, decent, like the eyes of a baby.

THE NEIGHBOURS

IN the remote country, Nature, at first sight so serene, so simple, will soon intrude on her observer a strange discomfort ; a feeling that some familiar spirit haunts the old lanes, rocks, wasteland, and trees, and has the power to twist all living things around into some special shape befitting its genius.

When moonlight floods the patch of moorland about the centre of the triangle between the little towns of Hartland, Torrington, and Holsworthy, a pagan spirit steals forth through the wan gorse ; gliding round the stems of the lonely, gibbet-like fir trees, peeping out amongst the reeds of the white marsh. That spirit has the eyes of a borderer, who perceives in every man a possible foe. And, in fact, this high corner of the land has remained border to this day, where the masterful, acquisitive invader from the North dwells side by side with the unstable, proud, quick-blooded Celt-Iberian.

In two cottages crowning some fallow land two families used to live side by side. That long white dwelling seemed all one, till the eye, peering through the sweet-briar which smothered the right-hand half, perceived the rude, weather-beaten presentment of a Running Horse, denoting the presence of intoxicating liquors ; and in a window of the left-hand half, that strange conglomeration of edibles and shoe-leather which proclaims the one shop of a primitive hamlet.

These married couples were by name Sandford at

the eastern and Leman at the western end ; and he who saw them for the first time thought : " What splendid-looking people ! "

They were all four above the average height, and all four as straight as darts. The innkeeper, Sandford, was a massive man, stolid, grave, light-eyed, with big fair moustaches, who might have stepped straight out of some Norseman's galley. Leman was lean and lathy, a regular Celt, with an amiable, shadowy, humorous face. The two women were as different as the men. Mrs. Sandford's fair, almost transparent cheeks coloured easily, her eyes were grey, her hair pale brown ; Mrs. Leman's hair was of a lustreless jet-black, her eyes the colour of a peaty stream, and her cheeks had the close creamy texture of old ivory.

Those accustomed to their appearance soon noted the qualifications of their splendour. In Sandford, whom neither sun nor wind ever tanned, there was a look as if nothing would ever turn him from acquisition of what he had set his heart on ; his eyes had the idealism of the worshipper of property, ever marching towards a heaven of great possessions. Followed by his cowering spaniel, he walked to his fields (for he farmed as well as kept the inn) with a tread that seemed to shake the lanes, disengaging an air of such heavy and complete insulation that even the birds were still. He rarely spoke. He was not popular. He was feared—no one quite knew why.

On Mrs. Sandford, for all her pink and white, sometimes girlish look, he had set the mark of his slow, heavy domination. Her voice was seldom heard. Once in a while, however, her reserve would yield to garrulity, as of water flowing through a broken dam. In these outbursts she usually spoke of her neighbours,

the Lemans, deploring the state of their marital relations. "A woman," she would say, "must give way to a man sometimes; I've had to give way to Sandford myself, I have." Her lips, from long compression, had become thin as the edge of a teacup; all her character seemed to have been driven down below the surface of her long, china-white face. She had not broken, but she had chipped; her edges had become jagged, sharp. The consciousness that she herself had been beaten to the earth seemed to inspire in her that waspish feeling towards Mrs. Leman—"a woman with a proud temper," as she would say in her almost lady-like voice; "a woman who's never bowed down to a man—that's what she'll tell you herself. 'Tisn't the drink that makes Leman behave so mad, 'tis because she won't give way to him. We're glad to sell drink to anyone we can, of course; but 'tisn't that what's makin' Leman so queer. 'Tis her."

Leman, whose long figure was often to be seen seated on the wooden bench of his neighbour's stone-flagged little inn, had, indeed, begun to have the soaked look and scent of a man never quite drunk, and hardly ever sober. He spoke slowly, his tongue seemed thickening, he no longer worked; his humorous, amiable face had grown hangdog and clouded. All the village knew of his passionate outbreaks and bursts of desperate weeping; and of two occasions when Sandford had been compelled to wrest a razor from him. People took a morbid interest in this rapid deterioration, speaking of it with misgiving and relish, unanimous in their opinion that—summat'd'appen about that; the drink wer duin' for George Leman, *that* it wer, praaperly!

But Sandford—that blond, ashy-looking Teuton—was not easy of approach, and no one cared to remon-

strate with him ; his taciturnity was too impressive, too impenetrable. Mrs. Leman, too, never complained. To see this black-haired woman, with her stoical, alluring face, come out for a breath of air, and stand in the sunlight, her baby in her arms, was to have looked on a very woman of the Britons. In conquering races the men, they say, are superior to the women ; in conquered races, the women to the men. She was certainly superior to Leman. That woman might be bent and mangled, she could not be broken ; her pride was too simple, too much a physical part of her. No one ever saw a word pass between her and Sandford. It was almost as if the old racial feelings of this borderland were pursuing in these two their unending conflict. For there they lived, side by side under the long, thatched roof, this great primitive, invading male, and that black-haired, lithe-limbed woman of older race, avoiding each other, never speaking—as much too much for their own mates as they were, perhaps, worthy of each other.

In this lonely parish, houses stood far apart, yet news travelled down the May-scented lanes and over the whin-covered moor with a strange speed ; blown perhaps by the west wind, whispered by the pagan genius of the place in his wanderings, or conveyed by small boys on large farm horses.

On Whit-Monday it was known that Leman had been drinking all Sunday ; for he had been heard on Sunday night shouting out that his wife had robbed him, and that her children were not his. All next day he was seen sitting in the bar of the inn soaking steadily. Yet on Tuesday morning Mrs. Leman was serving in her shop as usual—a really noble figure, with that lustreless black hair of hers—very silent, and ever sweetening her

eyes to her customers. Mrs. Sandford, in one of her bursts of garrulity, complained bitterly of the way her neighbours had "gone on" the night before. But unmoved, ashy, stolid as ever, Sandford worked in the most stony of his fields.

That hot, magnificent day wore to its end; a night of extraordinary beauty fell. In the gold moonlight the shadows of the lime-tree leaves lay, blacker than any velvet, piled one on the other at the foot of the little green. It was very warm. A cuckoo called on till nearly midnight. A great number of little moths were out; and the two broad meadows which fell away from the hamlet down to the stream were clothed in a glamorous haze of their own moonlit buttercups. Where that marvellous moonlight spread out across the moor it was all pale witchery; only the three pine-trees had strength to resist the wan gold of their fair visitor, and brooded over the scene like the ghosts of three great gallows. The long white dwelling of "the neighbours," bathed in that vibrating glow, seemed to be exuding a refulgence of its own. Beyond the stream a night-jar hunted, whose fluttering harsh call tore the garment of the scent-laden still air. It was long before sleep folded her wings.

A little past twelve o'clock there was the sound of a double shot. By five o'clock the next morning the news had already travelled far; and before seven quite a concourse had gathered to watch two mounted constables take Leman on Sandford's pony to Bideford Gaol. The dead bodies of Sandford and Mrs. Leman lay—so report ran—in the locked bedroom at Leman's end of the neighbours' house. Mrs. Sandford, in a state of collapse, was being nursed at a neighbouring cottage. The Leman children had been taken to the

Rectory. Alone of the dwellers in those two cottages, Sandford's spaniel sat in a gleam of early sunlight under the eastern porch, with her nose fixed to the crack beneath the door.

It was vaguely known that Leman had "done for 'em"; of the how, the why, the when, all was conjecture. Nor was it till the assizes that the story of that night was made plain, from Leman's own evidence, read from a dirty piece of paper :

"I, George Leman, make this confession—so help me God! When I came up to bed that evening, I was far gone in liquor and so had been for two days off and on, which Sandford knows. My wife was in bed. I went up, and I said to her: 'Get up!' I said; 'do what I tell you for once!' 'I will not!' she said. So I pulled the bedclothes off her. When I saw her all white like that, with her black hair, it turned me queer, and I ran downstairs and got my gun, and loaded it. When I came upstairs again, she was against the door. I pushed, and she pushed back. She didn't call out, or say one word—but pushed; she was never one to be afraid. I was the stronger, and I pushed-in the door. She stood up against the bed, defying me with her mouth tight shut, the way she had; and I put up my gun to shoot her. It was then that Sandford came running up the stairs and knocked the gun out of my hand with his stick. He hit me a blow over the heart with his fist, and I fell down against the wall and couldn't move. And he said: 'Keep quiet!' he said, 'you dog!' Then he looked at her. 'And as for you,' he said, 'you bring it on yourself! You can't bow down, can't you? I'll bow you down for once!' And he took and raised his stick. But he didn't strike her; he just looked at her in her nightdress, which was torn at

the shoulders, and her black hair ragged. She never said a word, but smiled at him. Then he caught hold of her by the arms, and they stood there. I saw her eyes; they were black as two sloes. He seemed to go all weak of a sudden, and white as the wall. It was like as they were struggling which was the better of them, meaning to come on to one another at the end. I saw what was in them as clear as I see this paper. I got up and crept round, and I took the gun and pointed it, and pulled the triggers one after the other, and they fell dead, first him, then her; they fell quietly, neither of them made a noise. I went out and lay down on the grass. They found me there when they came to take me. This is all I have to write, but it is true that I was far gone in liquor, which I had of him . . ."

1909.

STROKE OF LIGHTNING

THIS was before the war, and conditions were such that the tragedies and comedies of our private lives seemed still to have importance.

I had not seen my friend Frank Weymouth for some years, before coming across him and his wife that Christmas at the big hotel in Heliopolis. He was always a sunny fellow with a spilt-wine look about him, which not even a house-mastership at a Public School had been able to overcome : his wife, whom I had only met twice before, surprised me a little. I remembered a quiet, rather dark, little person with a doubting eye ; but this was a very kitten of a woman, brimful of mischief and chaff, and always on the go—reaction, no doubt, from the enforced decorum of a house where she was foster-mother of forty boys, in an atmosphere of being under glass, and the scrutiny of intensive propriety. In our Egyptian hotel, with its soft, clever Berberine servants, its huge hall, palm-garden and cosmopolitan guests, its golf-course with little dark, scurrying Arab caddies, and the desert at its doors, Jessie Weymouth frolicked and rolled her large dark eyes, scratched and caressed us with her little paws. Life had suddenly got into her, and left its tail outside for her to chase. She dragged us all along in her gay pursuit of it ; and Weymouth roused my admiration by his smiling acquiescence in her outrageous “goings-on.” He knew, I suppose, that she was devoted to him, and her bark no bite. His “term” had been a

hard one ; he was in a mood of lying-back, physically run down, mentally flattened out. To soak in idleness and the sun was all he seemed to care about.

. I forget who first conceived our desert trip, but it was Jessie Weymouth who fostered it. The Weymouths were not rich, and a desert trip costs money. They, myself, and a certain Breconridge couple had agreed to combine, when the Breconridges were suddenly summoned home by their daughter's illness. Jessie Weymouth danced with disappointment. "I shall die if we don't go now," she cried ; "we simply must scare up somebody."

We scared up the Radolins—an Austrian couple in our hotel whom we had been meeting casually after dinner. He was a Count, in a bank at Constantinople, and she, I think, the daughter of a Viennese painter. They used to interest me from being so very much the antithesis of the Weymouths. He was making the most of his holiday, dancing, playing, golf, riding ; while she seemed extraordinarily listless, pale, and, as it were, dragged along by her lively husband. I would notice her lounging alone in the gorgeous hall, gazing apparently at nothing. I could not make up my mind about her looks. Her figure was admirable, so were her eyes—ice-green, with dark lashes. But that air of tired indifference seemed to spoil her face. I remember doubting whether it were not going to spoil our trip. But Jessie Weymouth could not be denied, and Radolin, we all admitted, was good company.

We started, then, from Mena House, like all desert excursionists, on New Year's Day. We had only a fortnight before us, for the Weymouths were due back in England on the twentieth.

Our dragoman was a merry scoundrel by disposition

and an Algerian Bedouin by race. Besides him we had twelve Arabs, a Greek cook, seven camels, four donkeys and five tents. We took the usual route for the Fayoum. I remember our start so well. In front, Jessie Weymouth on a silver-grey donkey, and our scoundrel on his pet camel. Then Radolin, Weymouth and I on the other three donkeys, and Hélène Radolin perched up, remote and swaying, on the other riding camel. The pack camels had gone on ahead. All day we dawdled along, following the river towards Samara, where we camped that night at a due distance from the evil-smelling village. I had the middle tent, Weymouths to my right, Radolins to my left. Everything was well done by our merry scoundrel, and dinner, thanks to him, Jessie Weymouth and Radolin, a lively enough feast. Still, these first three days, skirting cultivation, were disappointing. But on the fourth we were well out on the lonely sands, and the desert air had begun to go to our heads. That night we camped among bare hills under a wonderful starry sky, cold and clear as crystal. Our scoundrel surpassed himself at dinner; Jessie Weymouth and Radolin were like madcaps, Weymouth his old sunny self. Only Hélène Radolin preserved her languor, not offensively, but as though she had lost the habit of gaiety. That night I made up my mind, however, that she really was a beautiful woman. The long days in the sun had given her colour, taken the tired look out of her face; and at least twice during the evening I caught Weymouth's eyes fixed on her as if he, too, had made that discovery.

The pranks of Jessie Weymouth and Radolin reached their limit at dinner, and they finished by rushing out into the night to the top of a neighbouring hillock.

Sitting in my tent doorway, counting the stars, I was

joined by our scoundrel. The fellow had been in England and knew about Western freedom and the manners of our women.

"She certainly is a good one, Mrs. Weymut," he said to me. "Mr. Weymut a very quiet man. I think he will be tired of her flirts, but he never say nothing—too bloody gentle. The Count he is a good one too, but the Countess—ah! she made of ice! We get some fresh fruit to-morrow at the Fayoum." He went on to his men, two hundred yards away among the camels.

It was wonderfully silent. The light from stars and a half-moon powdered the sands; no wind at all, yet deliciously cold—the desert in good mood; no influence quite so thrilling to pulses, yet so cooling to fevers; no sound, no movement in all the night!

"Isn't it heavenly? Good-night!"

Hélène Radolin was passing me in her fur. The look on her face, the movement of her body, seemed to belong to the lonely silence. She went into her tent. I sat on, smoking. And presently, outside the dining tent, I saw Weymouth, his head thrown back, drawing in deep breaths. By the light of the lantern over the tent door, he had a look as if inspired by a curious happy wonder. Then he too went to his tent. Ten minutes later the madcaps returned, Mrs. Weymouth in front, very quiet; her face, indeed, wore a rather mortified expression, as if she had fallen a little in her own estimation. They went into their tents, and I heard voices a moment, to left and right; then the stillness and the powdering light enveloped all.

Next day, bored with donkey-riding, I walked with the Arabs and saw little of my companions. Weymouth and the Countess, I think, were on the two riding camels,

Radolin and Mrs. Weymouth on their donkeys. We came to the edge of the Fayoum about five o'clock. That camping ground was narrow. In tents, when jammed together, one can't avoid hearing at least the tone of neighbouring talk, and I was struck by a certain acrimony in the Weymouth tent. Jessie Weymouth seemed complaining that Frank hadn't spoken to her all day.

"I suppose," she said, "you didn't like my running out with Countie last night?"

Weymouth's voice, quite good-humoured, answered:

"Oh! not a bit; why should I mind?"

By the ensuing silence I seemed to realise that Jessie Weymouth was disappointed. Perhaps I hadn't really a feeling of suspense that evening, but, in reminiscence, it seems to me I had. Dinner was certainly a disharmonic feast: little Mrs. Weymouth audacious and rueful; Weymouth and the Countess subdued, Radolin artificial; our scoundrel and myself had to make the running. That fellow was needle-sharp, though not always correct in his conclusions.

"Mrs. Weymut got a fly in her little eye," he said to me as I was turning in. "I make it all right to-morrow; I get a dancer at Sennourès. Oho, she is a good one! She make the married couples 'appy. We get some fresh eggs too."

Severe silence in the tents to right and left that night!

A whole day's travelling through the crops of the Fayoum brought us to the camping ground outside Sennourès, among a grove of palm trees—charming spot, but lacking the clear, cold spirituality of the desert night.

The dancer was certainly "a good one." What a baggage—all lithe, supple enticement, and jangle of

shivering beads ! The excitement of the Arabs, the shocked goggling eyes of Jessie Weymouth—quite a little Puritan when it came to the point !—the laughter of our scoundrel, Hélène Radolin's aloofness, which kept even that daughter of Egypt in her place, were what impressed me during the performance.

Towards the end the Egyptian made a dead set at Weymouth, and, getting nothing out of him except his smile, became quite cross. Leaning down to our scoundrel and slinking her eyes round at the Countess, she murmured something malicious. Our laughing scoundrel patted her, and we broke up. In ten minutes our camp was empty—dancer, Arabs, all had gone off to the village. I went out and stood in darkness among the palm trees, listening to the shivering of their leaves.

Inside the dining tent Radolin was playing the guitar. The sound was soothing after the vibrant Arab music. Presently I saw Weymouth come out of the tent. He stood under the lamp at the entrance, looking back ; his face was fully lighted for me, but invisible, I think, to those within. I shall never forget the look on it. Adoration incarnate !

"Hallo !" I thought, "what's this ?" And just then Hélène Radolin came out too. She passed him quietly ; he did not attempt to speak or follow ; but she saw. Oh ! yes, she saw ; then vanished into her tent. And Weymouth stood, rooted, as if struck by lightning, while, on and on, behind him rose the thrum of that guitar and all around us the shivering of the palm leaves in a gusty breeze.

Quite the custom, I believe, in these days to laugh at this sort of thing—at such sudden leaps of an irresponsible force ; to suggest that they are old-fashioned, overrated—literary, in fact. The equality of the sexes

—they say—the tendency of women towards brains and trousers, have diminished Venus; and yet, I fancy what happened to my friend Weymouth may still happen to young gentlemen who talk as if love had no fevers and no proprietary instincts; as if, when you burn for a woman, you are willing to leave her to another, or share her with him without fuss. Of course there are men who have no blood in their veins; but my friend Weymouth unfortunately had; not for nothing was the sunny, spilt-wine look about his hair and cheeks and dark-blue eyes.

For the rest of our desert trip the situation hopelessly promoted that adoration. Little Jessie Weymouth certainly did her best to help. She was the only one of us blind to what had happened. Her perceptions, you see, were blunted by the life of strenuous duty which she and Weymouth led in term time, and by the customary exhaustion of her husband during the holidays. She could not imagine him otherwise than sober. But now—if ever a man were drunk! The thing became so patent that it was quite painful to see her continued blindness. Not till sunset of the second day, with the Fayoum behind us, in our high camp on the desert's edge, did she sense her tragedy. *Those two* were sitting in camp-chairs close together, watching the sun go down. Our Arabs, presented with a ram to soothe their grief at abandoning the joys of the Fayoum, were noisily preparing the animal to the idea of being eaten. Our scoundrel and Radolin were absent; I was sketching; Jessie Weymouth lying down in her tent. *Those two* were alone—their faces turned towards each other, their hands, perhaps, touching. A strange violet was in the light over the bare hills: how much they saw of it, I know not, nor what they were saying to each

other, when Jessie Weymouth came out of her tent, stretching and yawning, and, like the kitten she was, went stealing up behind to startle them. Three yards away, unseen, unheard, I saw her stop. Her lips opened, her eyes went wide with amazement. Suddenly she covered them with her hands, turned round and stole back into her tent.

Five minutes later out she came again, with bright, hard spots of colour in her cheeks. I saw her run up to them, her feverish attempts at gaiety; and that to those two she simply did not exist. We none of us existed for them. They had found a world of their own, and we were shadows in the unreal world which they had left. You know the pink-flowered daphne, the scent of whose blossoms is very sweet, heavy, and slightly poisonous; sniff it too much and a kind of feverish fire will seize on you. Those two had sniffed the daphne!

Walls have singular value for civilised beings. In my thin tent between the thin tents of those two couples, prevented by lack of walls from any outlet to their feelings, I seemed to hear smothered reproaches, the smothered longings. It was the silence of two suddenly stricken lovers that was so impressive. I, literally, did not dare to speak to Weymouth while we were all mixed up like that. This English schoolmaster had lost, as if by magic, all power of seeing himself as others saw him. Not that those two "carried on"—nothing so normal; they just seemed to have stepped into quiet oblivion of everything but each other.

Even our scoundrel was puzzled. "In my house, when my wife behave bad, I beat her," he said to me; "when I behave bad she scratch my face." But there it was—we had no walls; Héléne Radolin could not

be beaten, Weymouth could not have his face scratched. It was most awkward.

Things come to an end, and I never breathed more freely than when Mena House delivered us from that frightful close companionship.

As if by common consent, we dined at separate tables. After dinner I said to Weymouth :

"Come up and see the Sphinx by moonlight."

He came, still in his dream. We reached the Sphinx in silence, and sat down over against her on the sand. At last I said :

"What are you going to do now, old man ?"

"I can't leave her." It was as if we had discussed the thing a dozen times already.

"But you have to be back on the twentieth ?"

"I know."

"My dear fellow, it's ruination. And Jessie ?"

"She must do what she likes."

"This is madness, Frank !"

"Perhaps. I can't go ; that's all."

"What about *her* ?"

"I don't know. I only know that where she goes I must."

I just sat staring at the blunt shadow of the Sphinx's broken profile on the moonlit sand. The strange actionless, desert love-dream was at an end indeed ! Something definite—horrible, perhaps—must happen now ! And I stammered out :

"For God's sake, old boy, think of your wife, your work, yourself—be reasonable ! It isn't worth it, really !"

"Perhaps not. This has nothing to do with reason."

From a master at an English Public School the remark appeared to me fantastic. And, suddenly, he got up, as

if he had been bitten. He was realising suddenly the difference that walls make. His face had a tortured look. The woman he loved, walled up with the man she had married! Behind us the desert, hundreds of miles of clean, savage sand, and in it we humans—tame and spiritual! Before us walls, and we humans—savages, carnal again! Queer! I doubt if he saw the irony; but he left me sitting there and went hurrying back to the hotel.

I stayed on a little with the riddle of the Ages, feeling it simple compared with this riddle of the moment. Then I followed him down. Would it resolve itself in terms of L.S.D.? After all, these four people had to live—could they afford to play fast and loose with the realities. Hélène Radolin had no money, I knew; Weymouth his mastership and a few hundreds saved; Jessie Weymouth a retired Colonel for a father; Radolin his banking partnership.

A night of walls had its effect. Radolin took his wife back to Heliopolis next day. The Weymouths remained at Mena House: in three days they were due to sail.

I well remember thinking: "There, you see, it doesn't do to exaggerate. This was a desert mirage and will pass like one. People are *not* struck by lightning!" But in a mood of morbid curiosity I went out to Heliopolis.

In the tramcar on the way I felt a sort of disappointment—Hélène Radolin was a Roman Catholic, Frank Weymouth an English gentleman. The two facts put such a stopper on what I wanted stopped. And we all have a sneaking love for the romantic, or—shall we say?—dramatic.

Well! The Radolins were gone. They had started

that morning for Constantinople. In the Oriental hall where all this had begun, I sat, browsing over my Turkish coffee, seeing again my friend Weymouth, languid and inert; his little wife's flirtatious liveliness; Radolin so *debonair*; Hélène Radolin, silent, her ice-green eyes slightly reddened in the lids as if she had been crying. The white-garbed Berberines slipped by; Greek gentlemen entertained their dubious ladies; Germans raised a guttural racket; the orchestra twanged out the latest tango. Nothing was changed but those figures of my vision. And suddenly one of them materialised—Weymouth was standing as if lost, where the lobby opened into the hall. From his face it was clear to me that he knew they were gone; before I could join him he went out hastily. I am sorry now that I did not follow.

That evening at Mena House I was just beginning to undress when Jessie Weymouth tapped on my door.

"Have you seen Frank?"

I told her where I had seen him in the afternoon.

"That woman!" she cried. "He's not come back."

I assured her that the Radolins were gone away home. She stared at me and began to cry. She cried and cried, and I did not try to stop her. She was not only desolate and miserable, but bitter and angry. "So long as she can be angry," I thought, "she'll get over it. One is not angry under a death-blow."

At last she had cried her misery out, but not her anger or dismay. What was she to do? I tried to persuade her that Frank would turn up in time for them to start to-morrow evening. He was probably trying to work the thing out of his system; she must look on it as a fever, a kind of illness. She laughed wildly, scornfully, and went out.

Weymouth did not turn up, but the morning brought me a letter, enclosing a cheque for £300, a note to his wife, and a sealed envelope addressed to the headmaster of his Public School.

The letter to me ran as follows :—

“ Old man, I admit that I am behaving like a cad ; but it’s either this or the sweet waters of oblivion ; and there’s less scandal this way. I have made up some story for my chief ; please post it. The cheque is for all my substance except some fifty pounds. Take care of it for my wife ; she’ll get another five hundred, about, out of the turnover of our house. She will go to her father, no doubt, and forget me, I hope. Do, please, like a good fellow, see her safely on board. It’s not likely that I shall ever come back to England. The future is quite dark, but where *she* is there I must be. Poste restante Constantinople will find me, so far as I know at present. Good-bye and bless you.

“ Your affectionate,

“ F. W.”

I did see Jessie Weymouth on board her ship, and a precious job it was.

A week later I, too, started for Constantinople, partly because I had promised Mrs. Weymouth, partly because I could not reconcile myself to the vision of my friend in the grip of his passion, without a job, almost without money.

The Radolins inhabited an old house on the far shore almost opposite the Rumeli Hissar. I called on them without warning, and found Hélène Radolin alone. In a room all Turkish stuffs and shadowy lights, she looked very different from her desert self. She had regained

her pale languor, but her face had a definite spirit, lacking when I first saw her. She spoke quite freely.

"I love him; but it is madness. I have tried to send him away; but he will not go. You see, I am a Catholic; my religion means much to me. I must not go away with him. Take him back to England with you; I cannot bear to see him ruin his life like this for me."

I confess to looking at her with the wonder whether it was religion or the lack of L.S.D.

"Ah!" she said. "You don't understand; you think I am afraid of poverty with him. No! I am afraid of losing my soul, and his."

The way she said that was extraordinary impressive. I asked her if she saw him.

"Yes, he comes. I have to let him. I cannot bear the look on his face when I say 'No.' " She gave me his address.

He had a garret in a little Greek hotel just above Galata—a ramshackle place, chosen for its cheapness. He did not seem surprised to see me. But I was startled. His face, shrunken and lined, had a bitter, burnt-up look, which deepened the set and colour of his eyes till they looked almost black. A long bout of disease will produce just that effect.

"If she didn't love me," he said, "I could bear it. But she does. Well! So long as I can see her, I shall stand it; and she'll come—she'll come to me at last."

I repeated her words to me; I spoke of his wife, of England—no memory, no allusion, no appeal touched him.

I stayed a month and saw him nearly every day; I did not move him by one jot. At the end of that month I should never have known him for the Frank Wey-

mouth who had started out with us from Mena House on New Year's Day. Changed! He was! I had managed to get him a teaching job through a man I knew at the Embassy—a poor enough job—a bare subsistence. And watching my friend day by day, I began to have a feeling of hatred for that woman. Yet I knew that her refusal to indulge their passion was truly religious. She really did see her lost soul and his, whirling entwined through purgatory like the souls of Paolo and Francesca in Watts' picture. Call it superstition, or what you will, her scruples were entirely genuine, and, from a certain point of view, quite laudable.

As for Radolin, he took it all precisely as if there were nothing to take; smooth and *debonair* as ever—a little harder about the mouth and eyes, and that was all.

The morning before I went home I made my way once more up the evil-smelling stair to my friend's garret. He was standing at the window, looking down over the bridge—that tragic bridge of Galata where unfortunates used to trade, perhaps still trade, the sight of their misfortunes. We stood there side by side.

"Frank," I said, "do you ever look at yourself in the glass? This can't go on."

No smile can be so bitter as a smile that used to be sunny.

"So long as I can see her, I shall last out."

"You surely don't want a woman to feel she's lost her soul, and is making you lose yours? She's perfectly sincere, in that."

"I know. I've given up asking. So long as I can see her, that's all."

It was mania!

That afternoon I took a boat over to the Radolins'.

It was April—the first real day of spring, balmy and warm. The Judas trees of the Rumeli Hissar were budding, the sun laying on the water the tints of opal; and all the strange city of mosques and minarets, Western commerce and Oriental beggary, was wonderfully living under that first spring sun. I brought my boat up to the Radolins' landing stage, and got out. I mounted the steps, greened over by the wash of the water, and entered their little garden courtyard. I had never come this way before, and stood for a moment looking through the mimosas and bougainvilleas for a door that would satisfy formality. There was a grille to the left, but to reach it I would have to pass in front of the wide ground-floor window, whence I had sometimes looked out over the water to the Rumeli Hissar. My shoes made no noise on the marble path, but what I saw in the room stopped me from trying to pass.

Hélène Radolin was sitting perfectly still in a low chair sideways to the window, her hands on her lap, her eyes fixed on the tiled floor, where a streak of sunlight fell. In the curve of her grand piano, resting his elbows on it, Weymouth was leaning back, equally still, gazing down at her. That was all. But the impression I received of life arrested, of frozen lava, was in a way terrible. I stole back down the steps into my boat, and out on to the opal-tinted waters.

I have nothing more to tell you of this business. The war came down on us all soon after. Rumours I have heard, but know nothing, as they say, of my own knowledge. Yet it has seemed to me worth while to set down this record of a "stroke of lightning," in days when people laugh at such absurdities.

SPINDLEBERRIES

THE celebrated painter, Scudamore—whose studies of Nature had been hung on the line for so many years that he had forgotten the days when, not yet in the Scudamore manner, they depended from the sky—stood where his cousin had left him so abruptly. His lips, between comely grey moustache and comely pointed beard, wore a mortified smile and he gazed rather dazedly at the spindleberries fallen on the flagged courtyard from the branch she had brought to show him. Why had she thrown up her head as if he had struck her, and whisked round so that those dull-pink berries quivered and lost their rain-drops, and four had fallen? He had but said: "Charming! I'd like to use them!" And she had answered: "God!" and rushed away. Alicia really was crazed, who would have thought that once she had been so adorable? He stooped and picked up the four berries—a beautiful colour, that dull pink! And from below the coatings of success and the Scudamore manner a little thrill came up; the stir of emotional vision. Paint! What good? How express? He went across to the low wall which divided the courtyard of his expensively restored and beautiful old house from the first flood of the River Arun wandering silvery in pale winter sunlight. Yes, indeed! How express Nature, its translucence and mysterious unities, its mood never the same from hour to hour? Those brown-tufted rushes over there against the gold grey of light and water—those restless

hovering, white gulls. A kind of disgust at his own celebrated manner welled up within him—the disgust expressed in Alicia’s “God!” Beauty! What use—how express it? Had she been thinking the same thing?

He looked at the four pink berries glistening on the grey stone of the wall and memory stirred. What a lovely girl she had been, with her grey-green eyes shining under long lashes, the rose-petal colour in her cheeks and the too-fine dark hair—now so very grey—always blowing a little wild. An enchanting, enthusiastic creature! He remembered, as if it had been but last week, that day when they started from Arundel Station by the road to Burpham, when he was twenty-nine and she twenty-five, both of them painters and neither of them famed—a day of showers and sunlight in the middle of March, and Nature preparing for full spring! How they had chatted at first; and when their arms touched, how he had thrilled, and the colour had deepened in her rain-wet cheeks; and then, gradually, they had grown silent; a wonderful walk, which seemed leading so surely to a more wonderful end. They had wandered round through the village and down past the chalk-pit and Jacob’s ladder, into the field path and so to the river bank. And he had taken her ever so gently round the waist, still silent, waiting for that moment when his heart would leap out of him in words and hers—he was sure—would leap to meet it. The path entered a thicket of blackthorn with a few primroses close to the little river running full and gentle. The last drops of a shower were falling, but the sun had burst through, and the sky above the thicket was cleared to the blue of speedwell flowers. Suddenly she had stopped and cried: “Look, Dick! Oh, look! It’s heaven!” A high bush of blackthorn was

lifted there, starry white against the blue and that bright cloud. It seemed to sing, it was so lovely ; the whole of spring was in it. But the sight of her ecstatic face had broken down all his restraint, and tightening his arm round her he had kissed her lips. He remembered still the expression of her face, like a child startled out of sleep. She had gone rigid, gasped, started away from him, quivered and gulped, and broken suddenly into sobs. Then, slipping from his arm, she had fled. He had stood at first, amazed and hurt, utterly bewildered ; then, recovering a little, had hunted for her full half an hour before at last he found her sitting on wet grass, with a stony look on her face. He had said nothing, and she nothing, except to murmur : " Let's go on ; we shall miss our train ! " And all the rest of that day and the day after, until they parted, he had suffered from the feeling of having tumbled down off some high perch in her estimation. He had not liked it at all ; it had made him very angry. Never from that day to this had he thought of it as anything but a piece of wanton prudery. Had it—had it been something else ?

He looked at the four pink berries, and, as if they had uncanny power to turn the wheel of memory, he saw another vision of his cousin five years later. He was married by then, and already hung on the line. With his wife he had gone down to Alicia's country cottage. A summer night, just dark and very warm. After many exhortations she had brought into the little drawing-room her last finished picture. He could see her now placing it where the light fell, her tall, slight form already rather sharp and meagre, as the figures of some women grow at thirty, if they are not married ; the nervous, fluttering look on her charming face, as

though she could hardly bear this inspection ; the way she raised her shoulder just a little as if to ward off an expected blow of condemnation. No need ! It had been a beautiful thing, a quite surprisingly beautiful study of night. He remembered with what a really jealous ache he had gazed at it—a better thing than he had ever done himself. And, frankly, he had said so. Her eyes had shone with pleasure.

“Do you really like it ? I tried so hard ! ”

“The day you show that, my dear,” he had said, “your name’s made ! ” She had clasped her hands and simply sighed : “Oh, Dick ! ” He had felt quite happy in her happiness, and presently the three of them had taken their chairs out, beyond the curtain, on to the dark verandah, had talked a little, then somehow fallen silent. A wonderful warm, black, grape-bloom night, exquisitely gracious and inviting ; the stars very high and white, the flowers glimmering in the garden-beds, and against the deep, dark blue, roses hanging, unearthly, stained with beauty. There was a scent of honeysuckle, he remembered, and many moths came fluttering by toward the tall, narrow chink of light between the curtains. Alicia had sat leaning forward, elbows on knees, ears buried in her hands. Probably they were silent because she sat like that. Once he heard her whisper to herself : “Lovely, lovely ! Oh, God ! How lovely ! ” His wife, feeling the dew, had gone in and he had followed ; Alicia had not seemed to notice. But when she too came in, her eyes were glistening with tears. She said something about bed in a queer voice ; they had taken candles and gone up. Next morning, going to her little studio to give her advice about that picture, he had been literally horrified to see it streaked with lines of white—Alicia, standing before it, was

dashing her brush in broad smears across and across. She heard him and turned round. There was a hard red spot in either cheek, and she said in a quivering voice: "It was blasphemy. That's all!" And turning her back on him she had gone on smearing it with white. Without a word, he had turned tail in simple disgust. Indeed, so deep had been his vexation at that wanton destruction of the best thing she had ever done or was ever likely to do, that he had avoided her for years. He had always had a horror of eccentricity. To have planted her foot firmly on the ladder of fame and then deliberately kicked it away; to have wantonly foregone this chance of making money—for she had but a mere pittance! It had seemed to him really too exasperating, a thing only to be explained by tapping one's forehead. Every now and then he still heard of her, living down there, spending her days out in the woods and fields, and sometimes even her nights, they said, and steadily growing poorer and thinner and more eccentric; becoming, in short, impossibly difficult, as only Englishwomen can. People would speak of her as "such a dear," and talk of her charm, but always with that shrug which is hard to bear when applied to one's relations. What she did with the productions of her brush he never inquired, too disillusioned by that experience. Poor Alicia!

The pink berries glowed on the grey stone, and he had yet another memory. A family occasion when Uncle Martin Scudamore departed this life, and they all went up to bury him and hear his will. The old chap, whom they had looked on as a bit of a disgrace, money-grubbing up in the little grey Yorkshire town which owed its rise to his factory, was expected to make amends by his death, for he had never married—too

sunk in industry, apparently, to have the time. By tacit agreement, his nephews and nieces had selected the Inn at Bolton Abbey, nearest beauty spot, for their stay. They had driven six miles to the funeral, in three carriages. Alicia had gone with him and his brother, the solicitor. In her plain black clothes she looked quite charming, in spite of the silver threads already thick in her fine dark hair, loosened by the moor wind. She had talked of painting to him with all her old enthusiasm, and her eyes had seemed to linger on his face as if she still had a little weakness for him. He had quite enjoyed that drive. They had come rather abruptly on the small grimy town clinging to the river banks, with old Martin's long, yellow-brick house dominating it, about two hundred yards above the mills. Suddenly, under the rug, he felt Alicia's hand seize his with a sort of desperation, for all the world as if she were clinging to something to support her. Indeed, he was sure she did not know it was his hand she squeezed. The cobbled streets, the muddy-looking water, the dingy, staring factories, the yellow, staring house, the little dark-clothed, dreadfully plain work-people, all turned out to do a last honour to their creator; the hideous new grey church, the dismal service, the brand-new tombstones—and all of a glorious autumn day! It was inexpressibly sordid—too ugly for words! Afterwards the will was read to them seated decorously on bright mahogany chairs in the yellow mansion, a very satisfactory will, distributing in perfectly adjusted portions, to his own kinsfolk and nobody else, a very considerable wealth. Scudamore had listened to it dreamily, with his eyes fixed on an oily picture, thinking, "My God! What a thing!" and longed to be back in the carriage smoking a cigar

to take the reek of black clothes and sherry—sherry!—out of his nostrils. He happened to look at Alicia. Her eyes were closed; her lips, always sweet-looking, quivered amusedly. And at that very moment the will came to her name. He saw those eyes open wide, and marked a beautiful pink flush, quite like that of old days, come into her thin cheeks. “Splendid!” he had thought; “it’s really jolly for her. I *am* glad. Now she won’t have to pinch. Splendid!” He shared with her to the full the surprised relief showing in her still beautiful face.

All the way home in the carriage he felt at least as happy over her good fortune as over his own, which had been substantial. He took her hand under the rug and squeezed it, and she answered with a long, gentle pressure, quite unlike the clutch when they were driving in. That same evening he strolled out to where the river curved below the Abbey. The sun had not quite set, and its last smoky radiance slanted into the burnished autumn woods. Some white-faced Herefords were grazing in lush grass, the river rippled and gleamed all over golden scales. About that scene was the magic which has so often startled the hearts of painters, the wistful gold—the enchantment of a dream. For some minutes he had gazed with delight which had in it a sort of despair. A little crisp rustle ran along the bushes; the leaves fluttered, then hung quite still. And he heard a voice—Alicia’s—speaking. “The lovely, lovely world!” And moving forward a step, he saw her standing on the river bank, braced against the trunk of a birch tree, her head thrown back, and her arms stretched wide apart as though to clasp the lovely world she had apostrophised. To have gone up to her would have been like breaking

up a lover's interview, and he turned round instead and went away.

A week later he heard from his brother that Alicia had refused her legacy. "I don't want it," her letter had said simply; "I couldn't bear to take it. Give it to those poor people who live in that awful place." Really eccentricity could go no further! They decided to go down and see her. Such mad neglect of her own good must not be permitted without some effort to prevent it. They found her very thin and charming; humble, but quite obstinate in her refusal. "Oh! I couldn't really! I should be so unhappy. Those poor little stunted people who made it all for him! That little, awful town. I simply couldn't be reminded. Don't talk about it please. I'm quite all right as I am." They had threatened her with lurid pictures of the workhouse and a destitute old age. To no purpose; she would not take the money. She had been forty when she refused that aid from heaven—forty, and already past any hope of marriage. For though Scudamore had never known for certain that she had ever wished or hoped for marriage, he had his theory—that all her eccentricity came from wasted sexual instinct. This last folly had seemed to him monstrous enough to be pathetic, and he no longer avoided her. Indeed, he would often walk over to tea in her little hermitage. With Uncle Martin's money he had bought and restored the beautiful old house over the River Arun, and was now only five miles from Alicia's, across country. She, too, would come tramping over at all hours, floating in with wild flowers or ferns, which she would put into water the moment she arrived. She had ceased to wear hats, and had by now a very doubtful reputation for sanity about the countryside. This was the period

when Watts was on every painter's tongue, and he seldom saw Alicia without a disputation concerning that famous symbolist. Personally, he had no use for Watts, resenting his faulty drawing and crude allegories, but Alicia always maintained with her extravagant fervour that he was great because he tried to paint the soul of things. She especially loved a painting called "Iris"—a female symbol of the rainbow, which indeed, in its floating eccentricity, had a certain resemblance to herself. "Of course he failed," she would say; "he tried for the impossible and went on trying all his life. Oh! I can't bear your rules and catchwords, Dick; what's the good of them! Beauty's too big, too deep!" Poor Alicia! She was sometimes very wearing.

He never knew quite how it came about that she went abroad with them to Dauphiné in the autumn of 1904—a rather disastrous business. Never again would he take anyone travelling who did not know how to come in out of the cold. It was a painter's country, and he had hired a little *chateau* in front of the Glandaz mountain—himself, his wife, their eldest girl, and Alicia. The adaptation of his famous manner to that strange scenery, its browns and French greys and filmy blues, so pre-occupied him that he had scant time for becoming intimate with these hills and valleys. From the little gravelled terrace in front of the annexe, out of which he had made a studio, there was an absorbing view over the pantiled old town of Die. It glistened below in the early or late sunlight, flat-roofed and of pinkish yellow, with the dim, blue river Drôme circling one side, and cut, dark cypress-trees dotting the vineyarded slopes. And he painted it continually. What Alicia did with herself they none of them very much knew,

except that she would come in and talk ecstatically of things and beasts and people she had seen. One favourite haunt of hers they did visit—a ruined monastery high up in the amphitheatre of the Glandaz mountain. They had their lunch up there, a very charming and remote spot, where the watercourses and ponds and chapel of the old monks were still visible, though converted by the farmer to his use. Alicia left them abruptly in the middle of their praises, and they had not seen her again till they found her at home when they got back. It was almost as if she had resented laudation of her favourite haunt. She had brought in with her a great bunch of golden berries, of which none of them knew the name; berries almost as beautiful as these spindleberries glowing on the stone of the wall. And a fourth memory of Alicia came.

Christmas Eve, a sparkling frost, and every tree round the little *chateau* rimed so that they shone in the starlight as though dowered with cherry blossom. Never were more stars in clear black sky above the whitened earth. Down in the little town a few faint points of yellow light twinkled in the mountain wind keen as a razor's edge. A fantastically lovely night—quite "Japanese," but cruelly cold. Five minutes on the terrace had been enough for all of them except Alicia. She—unaccountable, crazy creature—would not come in. Twice he had gone out to her, with commands, entreaties, and extra wraps; the third time he could not find her. She had deliberately avoided his onslaught and slid off somewhere to keep this mad vigil by frozen starlight. When at last she did come in she reeled as if drunk. They tried to make her really drunk, to put warmth back into her. No good! In two days she was down with double pneumonia; it was two months

before she was up again—a very shadow of herself. There had never been much health in her since then. She floated like a ghost through life, a crazy ghost, who would steal away, goodness knew where, and come in with a flush in her withered cheeks, and her grey hair wild blown, carrying her spoil—some flower, some leaf, some tiny bird or little soft rabbit. She never painted now, never even talked of it. They had made her give up her cottage and come to live with them, literally afraid that she would starve herself to death in her forgetfulness of everything. These spindleberries even! Why, probably, she had been right up this morning to that sunny chalk-pit in the lew of the Downs to get them, seven miles there and back, when you wouldn't think she could walk seven hundred yards, and as likely as not had lain there on the dewy grass looking up at the sky, as he had come on her sometimes. Poor Alicia! And once he had been within an ace of marrying her! A life spoiled! By what, if not by love of beauty? But who would have ever thought that the intangible could wreck a woman, deprive her of love, marriage, motherhood, of fame, of wealth, of health? And yet—by George!—it had!

Scudamore flipped the four pink berries off the wall. The radiance and the meandering milky waters; that swam against the brown tufted rushes; those far, filmy Downs—there was beauty! *Beauty!* But, damn it all—moderation! Moderation! And, turning his back on that prospect, which he had painted so many times, in his celebrated manner, he went in, and up the expensively restored staircase to his studio. It had great windows on three sides, and perfect means for regulating light. Unfinished studies melted into walls so subdued that they looked like atmosphere.

There were no completed pictures—they sold too fast. As he walked over to his easel his eye was caught by a spray of colour—the branch of spindleberries set in water, ready for him to use, just where the pale sunlight fell so that their delicate colour might glow and the few tiny drops of moisture still clinging to them shine. For a second he saw Alicia herself as she must have looked, setting them there, her transparent hands hovering, her eyes shining, that grey hair of hers all fine and loose. The vision vanished! But what had made her bring them after that horrified “God!” when he spoke of using them? Was it her way of saying: “Forgive me for being rude”? Really she was pathetic, that poor devotee! The spindleberries glowed in their silver-lustre jug, sprayed up against the sunlight. They looked triumphant—as well they might, who stood for that which had ruined—or was it saved?—a life! Alicia! She had made a pretty mess of it, and yet who knew what secret raptures she had felt with her subtle lover, Beauty, by starlight and sunlight and moonlight, in the fields and woods, on the hilltops, and by the river-side? Flowers, and the flight of birds, and the ripple of the wind, and all the shifting play of light and colour which made a man despair when he wanted to use them; she had taken them, hugged them to her with no after-thought, and been happy! Who could say that she had missed the prize of life? Who could say it? . . . Spindleberries! A bunch of spindleberries to set such doubts astir in him! Why, what was beauty but just the extra value which certain forms and colours, blended, gave to things—just the extra value in the human market! Nothing else on earth, nothing! And the spindleberries glowed against the sunlight, delicate, remote!

Taking his palette, he mixed crimson lake, white, and ultramarine. What was that? Who sighed away out there behind him? Nothing!

. "Damn it all!" he thought; "this is childish. This is as bad as Alicia!" And he set to work to paint in his celebrated manner—spindleberries.

1918.

SALTA PRO NOBIS

(A VARIATION)

"THE dancer, my Mother, is very sad. She sits with her head on her hands. She looks into the emptiness. It is frightful to watch. I have tried to make her pray, my Mother, but the poor girl—she does not know how ; she has no belief. She refuses even to confess herself. She is pagan—but quite pagan. What could one do for her, my Mother—to cheer her a little during these hours? I have tried to make her tell me of her life. She does not answer. She sits and looks always into the emptiness. It does me harm in the heart to see her. Is there nothing one can do to comfort her a little before she dies. To die so young—so full of life ; for her who has no faith ! To be shot—so young, so beautiful ; but it is frightful, my Mother ! ”

When she had finished speaking thus, the little elderly Sister raised her hands, and crossed them quietly on her grey-clothed breast. Her eyes, brown and mild, looked up, questioning the face before her, wax pale under its coif and smooth grey hair. Straight, thin, as it were bodiless, beneath the grey and white of her garb, the Mother Superior stood pondering. The spy-woman in her charge, a dancer with gypsy blood they said—or was it Moorish?—who had wormed secrets from her French naval lover, and sold them to the Germans in Spain. At the trial they said there was no doubt. And they had brought her to the Convent, saying, “ Keep her for us till the fifteenth. She will

be better with you than in prison." To be shot—a woman! It made one shiver! And yet—it was war! It was for France!

Looking down at the little Sister with the soft brown eyes, the Mother Superior answered:

"One must see, my daughter. Take me to her cell."

Along the corridor they passed, and went in gently. The dancer was sitting on her bed, with legs crossed under her. There was no colour in her skin, save the saffron sprinkled into it by Eastern blood. The face was oval, the eyebrows slanted a little up; black hair formed on her forehead a V reversed; her lips, sensuous but fine, showed a gleam of teeth. Her arms were crossed, as though compressing the fire within her supple body. Her eyes, colour of Malaga wine, looked through and beyond the whitened walls, through and beyond her visitors, like the eyes of a caged leopard.

The Mother Superior spoke:

"What can we do for you, my daughter?"

The daughter shrugged her body from the waist; one could see its supple shivering beneath her silk garment.

"You suffer, my daughter. They tell me you do not pray. It is a pity."

The dancer smiled—that quickly passing smile had sweetness, as of something tasted, of a rich tune, of a long kiss; she shook her head.

"One would not say anything to trouble you, my daughter; one feels pity for your suffering. One comprehends. Is there a book you would read; some wine you would like; in a word anything which could distract you a little?"

The dancer untwined her arms, and clasped them

behind her neck. The movement was beautiful, sinuous—all her body beautiful; and into the Mother Superior's waxen cheeks a faint colour came.

"Will you dance for us, my daughter?"

Again the smile, like the taste of a sweet wine, came on the dancer's face, and this time did not pass.

"Yes," she said, "I will dance for you—willingly. It will give me pleasure, Madame!"

"That is good. Your dresses shall be brought. This evening in the refectory, after the meal. If you wish music—one can place a piano. Sister Mathilde is a good musician."

"Yes, music—some simple dances. Madame, could I smoke?"

"Certainly, my daughter. I will have cigarettes brought to you."

The dancer stretched out her hand. Between her own fragile with thin blue veins, the Mother Superior felt its supple warmth, and shivered. To-morrow it would be cold and stiff!

"*Au revoir!* then, my daughter. . . ."

"The dancer will dance for us!" This was the word. One waited, expectant, as for a marvel. One placed the piano; procured music; sat eating the evening meal—whispering. The strangeness of it! The intrusion! The little gay ghosts of memories. Ah! the dramatic, the strange event! Soon the meal was finished; the tables cleared, removed; against the wall, on the long benches sixty grey figures with white coifs waited—in the centre the Mother Superior, at the piano Sister Mathilde.

The little elderly Sister came first; then, down the long whitened refectory, the dancer walking slowly over the dark oak floor. Every head was turned—

alone the Mother Superior sat motionless, thinking :
" If only it does not put notions into some light heads ! "

The dancer wore a full skirt of black silk, she had silvery shoes and stockings, round her waist was a broad tight network of gold, over her bust tight silvery tissue, with black lace draped ; her arms were bare ; a red flower was set to one side of her black hair ; she held a black and ivory fan. Her lips were just touched with red, her eyes just touched with black ; her face was like a mask. She stood in the very centre, with eyes cast down. Sister Mathilde began to play. The dancer lifted her fan. In that dance of Spain she hardly moved from where she stood swaying, shivering, spinning, poised ; only the eyes of her face seemed alive, resting on this face and on that of the long row of faces, where so many feelings were expressed—curiosity and doubt, pleasure, timidity, horror, curiosity. Sister Mathilde ceased playing, the dancer stood still ; a little murmur broke along the line of nuns, and the dancer smiled. Then Sister Mathilde began again to play, a Polish dance ; for a moment the dancer listened as if to catch the rhythm of music strange to her ; then her feet moved, her lips parted, she was sweet and gay, like a butterfly, without a care ; and on the lips of the watching faces smiles came, and little murmurs of pleasure escaped.

The Mother Superior sat without moving, her thin lips pressed together, her thin fingers interlaced. Images from the past kept staring out, and falling back, like figures from some curious old musical box. That long-ago time—she was remembering—when her lover was killed in the Franco-Prussian war, and she entered religion. This supple figure from the heathen world, the red flower in the black hair, the whitened face, the

sweetened eyes, stirred up remembrance, sweet and yearning, of her own gay pulses, before they had seemed to die, and she brought them to the Church to bury them.

The music ceased ; began again a *Habañera*, reviving memories of the pulses after they were buried—secret, throbbing, dark. The Mother Superior turned her face to left and right. Had she been wise ? So many light heads, so many young hearts ! And yet, why not soothe the last dark hours of this poor heathen girl ? She was happy, dancing. Yes, she was happy ! What power ! And what abandonment ! It was frightening. She was holding every eye—the eyes even of Sister Louise—holding them as a snake holds a rabbit's eyes. The Mother Superior nearly smiled. That poor Sister Louise ! And then, just beyond that face of fascinated horror, the Mother Superior saw young Sister Marie. How the child was staring—what eyes, what lips ! Sister Marie—so young—just twenty—her lover dead in the war—but one year dead ! Sister Marie—prettiest in all the Convent ! Her hands—how tightly they seemed pressed together on her lap. And—but yes—it was at Sister Marie that the dancer looked ; at Sister Marie she twirled and writhed those supple fiery limbs ! For Sister Marie the strange sweet smile came and went on those enticing reddened lips. In dance after dance—like a bee on a favourite flower—to Sister Marie the dancer seemed to cling. And the Mother Superior thought : “ Is this the Blessed Virgin's work I have done, or—the Devil's ? ”

Close along the line of nuns the dancer was sweeping now ; her eyes glowed, her face was proud, her body supreme. Sister Marie ! What was it ? A look, a touch with the fan ! The music ceased. The dancer

blew a kiss. It lighted—where? “*Gracias, Senoras! Adios!*”

Slowly swaying, as she had come, she walked away over the dark floor; and the little old Sister followed. A sighing sound from the long row of nuns; and—yes—one sob!

“Go to your rooms, my daughters! Sister Marie!”

The young nun came forward; tears were in her eyes.

“Sister Marie, pray that the sins of that poor soul be forgiven. But yes, my child it is sad. Go to your room. Pray!”

With what grace the child walked! She, too, had the limbs of beauty. The Mother Superior sighed. . . .

Morning, cold, grey, a sprinkle of snow on the ground; they came for the dancer during Mass. A sound of firing! With trembling lips, the Mother Superior prayed for the soul dancing before her God. . . .

That evening they searched for Sister Marie, but could not find her. After two days a letter came:

Forgive me, my Mother. I have gone back to life.

“MARIE.”

The Mother Superior sat quite still. Life in death! Figures starting out from that old musical box of memory; the dancer's face, red flower in the hair, dark sweetened eyes, lips, touched with flying finger, parted in a kiss!

THE PACK

"It's only," said H., "when men run in packs that they lose their sense of decency. At least that's my experience. Individual man—I'm not speaking of savages—is more given to generosity than meanness, rarely brutal, inclines in fact to be a gentleman. It's when you add three or four more to him that his sense of decency, his sense of personal responsibility, his private standards, go by the board. I am not at all sure that he does not become the victim of a certain infectious fever. Something physical takes place, I fancy. . . . I happen to be a trustee, with three others, and we do a deal of cheeseparing in the year, which as private individuals we should never dream of."

"That's hardly a fair example," said D., "but on the whole, I quite agree. Single man is not an angel; collective man is a bit of a brute."

The discussion was carried on for several minutes, and then P., who had not yet spoken, said: "They say a pinch of illustration is worth a pound of argument. When I was at the 'Varsity there was a man at the same college with me called Chalkcroft, the son of a high ecclesiastic, a perfectly harmless, well-mannered individual, who had the misfortune to be a Radical, or, as some even thought, a Socialist—anyway, he wore a turn-down collar, a green tie, took part in Union debates on the shady side, and no part in college festivities. He was, in fact, a 'smug'—a man, as you know, who, through some accident of his early environ-

ment, incomprehensibly fails to adopt the proper view of life. He was never drunk, not even pleasantly, played no games connected with a ball, was believed to be afraid of a horse or a woman, took his exercise in long walks with a man from another college, or solitarily in a skiff upon the river; he also read books, and was prepared to discuss abstract propositions. Thus, in one way or another he disgusted almost every self-respecting undergraduate. Don't imagine, of course, that his case was unusual; we had many such at M—— in my time; but about this Chalkcroft there was an unjustifiable composure, a quiet sarcasm, which made him conspicuously intolerable. He was thought to be a 'bit above himself,' or, rather, he did not seem conscious, as any proper 'smug' should that he was a bit below his fellows; on the contrary, his figure, which was slim, and slightly stooping, passed in and about college with serene assurance; his pale face with its traces of reprehensible whisker, wore a faint smile above his detested green tie; besides, he showed no signs of that poverty which is, of course, some justification to 'smugs' for their lack of conformity. As a matter of fact, he was *not* poor, but had some of the best rooms in college, which was ever a remembered grievance against him. For these reasons, then," went on P., "it was decided one evening to bring him to trial. This salutary custom had originated in the mind of a third-year man named Jefferies, a dark person with a kind of elephant-like unwieldiness in his nose and walk, a biting, witty tongue, and very small eyes with a lecherous expression. He is now a baronet. This gentleman in his cups had quite a pretty malice, and a sense of the dignity of the law. Wandering of a night in the quadrangles, he never had any difficulty in

gathering a troop of fellows in search of distraction, or animated by public and other spirits ; and, with them whooping and crowing at his heels, it was his beneficial practice to enter the rooms of any person, who for good and sufficient reasons merited trial, and thereupon to conduct the same with all the ceremony due to the dispensation of British justice. I had attended one of these trials before on a chuckle-headed youth whose buffoonery was really offensive. The ceremony was funny enough, nor did the youth seem to mind, grinning from ear to ear, and ejaculating continually, ' Oh ! I say, Jefferies ! '

" The occasion of which I am going to speak now was a different sort of affair altogether. We found the man Chalkcroft at home, reading before his fire by the light of three candles. The room was panelled in black oak, and the yellow candle flames barely lit up the darkness as we came whooping in.

" ' Chalkcroft,' said Jefferies, ' we are going to try you.' Chalkcroft stood up and looked at us. He was in a Norfolk jacket, with his customary green tie, and his face was pale.

" He answered : ' Yes, Jefferies ? You forgot to knock.'

" Jefferies put out his finger and thumb and delicately plucked Chalkcroft's tie from out of his waistcoat.

" ' You wear a green tie, sir,' he said.

" Chalkcroft went the colour of the ashes in the grate ; then, slowly a white-hot glow came into his cheeks.

" ' Don't look at me, sir,' said Jefferies ; ' look at the jury ! ' and he waved his hand at us. ' We are going to try you for——' He specified an incident of a scabrous character which served as the charge on all such humor-

ous occasions, and was likely to be peculiarly offensive to 'smugs,' who are usually, as you know, what is called 'pi.'

"We yelped, guffawed, and settled ourselves in chairs; Jefferies perched himself on a table and slowly swung his thin legs; he always wore very tight trousers. His little black eyes gleamed greedily above his unwieldy nose. Chalkcroft remained standing.

"It was then," pursued P., "that I had my first qualm. The fellow was so still and pale and unmoved; he looked at me, and, when I tried to stare back, his eyes passed me over, quiet and contemptuous. And I remember thinking: 'Why are we all here—we are not a bit the kind of men to do this sort of thing?' And really we were not. With the exception of Jefferies, who was, no doubt, at times inhabited by a devil, and one Anderson, a little man in a long coat, with a red nose and very long arms, always half-drunk—a sort of desperate character, and long since a schoolmaster—there wasn't one of us who, left to himself, would have entered another man's rooms unbidden (however unpopular he might be, however much of a 'smug'), and insulted him to his face. There was Beal, a very fair, rather good-looking man, with bowed legs and no expression to speak of, known as Boshy Beal; Dunsdale, a heavy, long-faced, freckled person, prominent in every college disturbance, but with a reputation for respectability; Horden (called Jos), a big, clean-cut Kentish man with nice eyes, and fists like hammers; Stickland, fussy, with mild habits; Sevenoax, now in the House of Lords; little Holingbroke, the cox; and my old schoolfellow, Fosdyke, whose dignity even then would certainly have forbidden his presence had he not previously dined. Thus, as you see, we were all

or nearly all from the 'best' schools in the country, in the 'best' set at M——, and naturally, as individuals, quite—oh! quite—incapable of an ungentlemanlike act.

"Jefferies appointed Anderson gaoler, Dunsdale Public Prosecutor, no one counsel for the defence, the rest of us jury, himself judge, and opened the trial. He was, as I have said, a witty young man, and, dangling his legs, fastening his malevolent black eyes on Chalkcroft, he usurped the functions of us all. The nature of the charge precludes me from recounting to you the details of the trial, and, in fact, I have forgotten them, but as if he were standing here before us, I remember, in the dim glow of those three candles, Chalkcroft's pale, unmoved, ironic face; his unvarying, 'Yes, Jefferies'; his one remonstrance: 'Are you a gentleman, Jefferies?' and our insane laughter at the answer: 'No, sir, a by-our-Lady judge.' As if he were standing here before us I remember the expression on his face at the question: 'Prisoner, are you guilty—yes or no?' the long pause, the slow, sarcastic: 'As you like Jefferies.' As if he were standing here before us I remember his calm and his contempt. He was sentenced to drink a tumbler of his own port without stopping; whether the sentence was carried out I cannot tell you; for with one or two more I slipped away.

"The next morning I had such a sense of discomfort that I could not rest till I had sent Chalkcroft a letter of apology. I caught sight of him in the afternoon walking across the quad, with this usual pale assurance, and in the evening I received his answer. It contained, at the end, this sentence: 'I feel sure you would not have come if it hadn't been for the others.' It has occurred to me since that he may have said the same

thing to us all—for anything I know, we may all of us have written.”

There was a silence. Then H. said: “The Pack! Ah! What second-hand devil is it that gets into us when we run in packs?”

1905.

“THE DOG IT WAS THAT DIED”

UNTIL the Great War was over I had no idea that some of us who stayed at home made the great sacrifice.

My friend Harburn is, or rather was, a Northumbrian or some kind of northerner, a stocky man of perhaps fifty with close-clipped grizzled hair and moustache and a deep-coloured face. He was a neighbour of mine in the country, and we had the same kind of dogs—Airedales, never less than three at a time, so that for breeding purposes we were useful to each other. We often, too, went up to town by the same train. His occupation was one which gave him opportunity of prominence in public life, but until the war he took little advantage of this, sunk in a kind of bluff indifference which was almost cynical. I used to look on him as a typically good-natured, blunt Englishman, rather enjoying his cynicism, and appreciating his open-air tendencies—for he was a devotee of golf and fond of shooting when he had the chance; a good companion, too, with an open hand to people in distress. He was unmarried, and dwelled in a bungalow-like house not far from mine and next door to a German family called Holsteig, who had lived in England nearly twenty years. I knew them pretty well also—a very united trio—father, mother, and one son. The father, who came from Hanover, was something in the city, the mother was Scotch, and the son—the one I knew best and liked most—had just left his public school. This youth had a frank, open, blue-eyed face, and thick

light hair brushed back without a parting—an attractive, rather Norwegian-looking type. His mother was devoted to him—she was a real West Highlander; slight, with dark hair going grey, high cheekbones, a sweet but ironical smile, and those grey eyes which have second sight in them. I several times met Harburn at their house, for he would go in to play billiards with Holsteig in the evenings, and the whole family were on friendly terms with him. The third morning after we had declared war on Germany, Harburn, Holsteig, and I went up to town in the same carriage. Harburn and I talked freely. But Holsteig, a fair, well-set-up man of about fifty, with a pointed beard and blue eyes like his son, sat immersed in his paper, till Harburn said rather suddenly :

" I say, Holsteig, is it true that your boy was going off to join the German Army ? "

Holsteig looked up.

" Yes," he said. " He was born in Germany, so he's liable to military service. Thank heaven—it isn't possible for him to go ! "

" But his mother ? " said Harburn. " She surely wouldn't have let him."

" She was very miserable, of course, but she thought duty came first."

" Duty ! Good God—my dear man ! Half British, and living in this country all his life ! I never heard of such a thing ! "

Holsteig shrugged his shoulders.

" In a crisis like this what can you do except follow the law strictly ? He is of military age and a German subject. We were thinking of his honour ; but, of course, we're most thankful he can't get over to Germany."

"Well, I'm damned!" said Harburn. "You Germans are too bally conscientious altogether."

Holsteig did not answer.

I travelled back with Harburn the same evening, and he said to me:

"Once a German, always a German. Didn't that chap Holsteig astonish you this morning? In spite of living here so long and marrying a British wife, his sympathies are dead German, you see."

"Well," I replied, "put yourself in his place."

"I can't; I could never have lived in Germany. I say, Cumbermere," he added, "I wonder if the chap's all right?"

"Of course he's all right." Which was the wrong thing to say to Harburn if one wanted to re-establish his confidence in the Holsteigs, as I certainly did, for I liked them and was sure of their good faith. If I had said:

"Of course he's a spy," I should have rallied all Harburn's confidence in Holsteig, for he was naturally contradictory.

I only mention this little passage to show how early Harburn's thoughts began to turn to the subject which afterwards completely absorbed and inspired him till he—er—died for his country.

I am not sure what paper first took up the question of interning all the Huns; but I fancy the point was raised originally rather from the instinct, deeply implanted in so many journals, to do what would please the public than out of any deep animus. At all events, I remember meeting a sub-editor who told me he had been opening letters of approval all the morning. "Never," said he, "have we had a stunt catch on so quickly. Why should that bally German round the

corner get my custom?' and so forth. Britain for the British!"

"Rather bad luck," I said, "on people who've paid us the compliment of finding this the best country to live in?"

"Bad luck, no doubt," he replied, "but war's war. You know Harburn, don't you? Did you see that article he wrote? By Jove! he pitched it strong."

When next I met Harburn himself he began talking on this subject at once.

"Mark my words," he said, "I'll have every German out of this country." His grey eyes seemed to glint with the snap and spark as of steel and flint and tinder; and I felt I was in the presence of a man who had brooded so over the German atrocities in Belgium that he was possessed by a sort of abstract hate.

"Of course," I said, "there have been many spies, but——"

"Spies and ruffians," he cried, "the whole lot of them."

"How many Germans do you know personally?" I asked him.

"Thank God! not a dozen."

"And are they spies and ruffians?"

He looked at me and laughed, but that laugh was uncommonly like a snarl.

"You go in for fairness," he said, "and all that slop; take 'em by the throat—it's the only way."

It trembled on the tip of my tongue to ask him whether he meant to take the Holsteigs by the throat, but I swallowed it for fear of doing them an injury. I was feeling much the same general abhorrence myself, and had to hold myself in for fear it should gallop over my common sense of justice. But Harburn, I could

see, was giving it full rein. His whole manner and personality somehow had changed. He had lost geniality and that good-humoured cynicism which had made him an attractive companion ; he was as if gnawed at inwardly—in a word, he already had a fixed idea.

Now, a cartoonist, like myself, has to be interested in the psychology of men, and I brooded over Harburn, for it seemed to me quite remarkable that one whom I had always associated with good humour and bluff indifference should be thus obsessed. And I found this theory about him : “ Here ”—I said to myself—“ is one of Cromwell’s Ironsides, born out of his age. In the slack times of peace he discovered no outlet for the grim within him—his fire could never be lighted by love, therefore he drifted in the waters of indifferentism. Now, suddenly, in this grizzly time he has found himself, a new man, girt and armed by this new passion of hate ; stung and uplifted, as it were, by the sight of that which he can smite with a whole heart. It really is most deeply interesting. Who could have dreamed of such a reincarnation ; for what on the surface could possibly be less like an ‘ Ironside ’ than Harburn as I’ve known him up to now ? ” I used his face for the basis of a cartoon which represented a human weather-vane continually pointing to the East, no matter from what quarter the wind blew. He recognised himself, and laughed when he saw me—rather pleased, in fact ; but in that laugh there was a sort of truculence as if the man had the salt taste of blood at the back of his mouth.

“ Ah ! ” said he, “ you may joke about it, Cumbermere, but I’ve got my teeth into the swine ! ”

And there was no doubt he had—the man had been “ Never, a force ; unhappy Germans—a few of them spies, quickly. . . . ” But, but the great majority as certainly innocent

—were being wrenched from their trades and families and piled into internment camps all day and every day—and the faster they were piled in, the higher grew his " stock " as a servant of his country. I'm sure he did not do it to gain credit ; the thing was a crusade to him, something sacred—" his bit " ; but I believe he also felt for the first time in his life that he was really living, getting out of life the full of its juice. Was he not smiting hip and thigh ? He longed, I am sure, to be in the thick of the actual fighting, but age debarred him, and he was not of that more sensitive type which shrinks from smiting the defenceless if it cannot smite anything stronger. I remember saying to him once :

" Harburn, do you ever think of the women and children of your victims ? "

He drew his lips back, and I saw how excellent his teeth were.

" The women are worse than the men, I believe," he said. " I'd put them in, too, if I could. As for the children, they're all the better for being without fathers of that kidney."

He really was a little mad on the subject ; no more so, of course, than any other man with a fixed idea, but certainly no less.

In those days I was here, there, and everywhere, and had let my country cottage, so I saw nothing of the Holsteigs, and, indeed, had pretty well forgotten their existence. But coming back at the end of 1917 from a long spell with the Red Cross, I found among my letters one from Mrs. Holsteig.

" DEAR MR. CUMBERMERE,

" You were always so friendly to us that I have summoned up courage to write this letter. You know,

perhaps, that my husband was interned over a year ago, and repatriated last September; he has lost everything, of course, but so far he is well and able to get along in Germany. Harold and I have been jogging on here as best we can on my own little income—'Huns in our midst' as we are, we see practically nobody. What a pity we cannot all look into each other's hearts, isn't it? I used to think we were a 'fair-play' people, but I have learned the bitter truth, that there is no such thing when pressure comes. It's much worse for Harold than for me; he feels his paralysed position intensely, and would, I'm sure, really rather be 'doing his bit' as an interned than be at large, subject to everyone's suspicion and scorn. But I am terrified all the time that they *will* intern him. You used to be intimate with Mr. Harburn. We have not seen him since the first autumn of the war, but we know that he has been very active in the agitation and is very powerful in this matter. I have wondered whether he can possibly realise what this indiscriminate internment of the innocent means to the families of the interned. Could you not find a chance to try and make him understand? If he and a few others were to stop hounding on the Government, it would cease, for the authorities must know perfectly well that all the dangerous have been disposed of long ago. You have no notion how lonely one feels in one's native land nowadays; if I should lose Harold, too, I think I might go under, though that has never been my habit.

"Believe me, dear Mr. Cumbermere,

"Most truly yours,

"HELEN HOLSTEIG."

On receiving this letter I was moved by compassion,

for it required no stretch of imagination to picture the life of that lonely British mother and her son; and I thought very carefully over the advisability of speaking to Harburn, and consulted the proverbs: "Speech is silver, but silence is gold—When in doubt, play trumps." "Second thoughts are best—He who hesitates is lost." "Look before you leap—Delays are dangerous." They balanced so perfectly that I had to recourse to commonsense, which told me to abstain. But meeting Harburn at the club a few days later and finding him in a genial mood, I let impulse prevail.

"By the way," I said, "you remember the Holsteigs? I had a letter from poor Mrs. Holsteig the other day; she seems terrified that they'll intern her son, that particularly nice boy. Don't you think it's time you let up on these unhappy people?" The moment I reached the word Holsteig I saw I had made a mistake, and only went on because to have stopped at that would have been worse still. The hair had bristled up on his back, as it were, and he said:

"Holsteig! That young pup who was off to join the German Army if he could? By George, is he at large still? This Government will never learn. I'll remember him."

"Harburn," I stammered, "I spoke of this in confidence. The boy is half British and a friend of mine. I thought he was a friend of yours, too."

"Of mine?" he said. "No, thank you. No mongrels for me. As to confidence, Cumbermere, there's no such thing in war time over what concerns the country's safety."

"Good God!" I exclaimed. "You really are crazy on this subject. That boy—with his bringing-up!"

He grinned. "We're taking no risks," he said,

"and making no exceptions. The British Army or an internment camp. I'll see that he gets the alternative."

"If you do," I said, rising, "we cease to be friends. I won't have my confidence abused!"

"Oh! Hang it all," he grumbled, "sit down! We must all do our duty."

"You once complained to Holsteig himself of that German peculiarity."

He laughed. "I did," he said; "I remember—in the train. I've changed since then. That pup ought to be in with all the other swine-hounds. But let it go."

There the matter rested, for he had said: "Let it go," and he was a man of his word. It was, however, a lesson to me not to meddle with men of temperament so different from my own. I wrote to young Holsteig and asked him to come and lunch with me. He thanked me, but could not, of course, being confined to a five-mile radius. Really anxious to see him, I motor-biked down to their house. I found a very changed youth; moody and introspective, thoroughly forced in upon himself, and growing bitter. He had been destined for his father's business, and, marooned as he was by his nationality, had nothing to do but raise vegetables in their garden and read poetry and philosophy, not occupations to take a young man out of himself. Mrs. Holsteig, whose nerves were evidently at cracking point, had become extremely bitter and lost all power of seeing the war as a whole. All the ugly human qualities and hard people which the drive and pressure of a great struggle inevitably bring to the fore seemed viewed by her now as if they were the normal character of her fellow-countrymen, and she made no allowance for the fact that those fellow-countrymen had not commenced

this struggle, nor for the certainty that the same ugly qualities and hard people were just as surely to the fore in every other of the fighting countries. The certainty she felt about her husband's honour had made her regard his internment and subsequent repatriation as a personal affront as well as a wicked injustice. Her tall, thin figure and high-cheekboned face seemed to have been scorched and withered by some inner flame ; she could not have been a wholesome companion for her boy in that house, empty even of servants. I spent a difficult afternoon in muzzling my sense of proportion, and journeyed back to town sore, but very sorry.

I was off again with the Red Cross shortly after, and did not return to England till August of 1918. I was unwell, and went down to my cottage, now free to me again.

The influenza epidemic was raging, and there I developed a mild attack ; when I was convalescent my first visitor was Harburn, who had come down to his bungalow for a summer holiday. He had not been in the room five minutes before he was off on his favourite topic. My nerves must have been on edge from illness, for I cannot express the disgust with which I listened to him on that occasion. He seemed to me just like a dog who mumbles and chews a mouldy old bone with a sort of fury. There was a kind of triumph about him, too, which was unpleasant, though not surprising, for he was more of a force than ever.

"God save me from the fixed idea!" I thought, when he had gone. That evening I asked my old housekeeper if she had seen young Mr. Holsteig lately.

"Oh! no," she said, "he's been put away this five month. Mrs. Holsteig goes up once a week to see 'im. She's nigh out of her mind, poor lady, the baker says—

that fierce she is about the Government for takin' 'im off."

I confess I could not bring myself to go and see her.

About a month after the armistice had been signed I came down to my cottage again. Harburn was in the same train, and he gave me a lift from the station. He was more like his old good-humoured self, and asked me to dinner the next day. It was the first time I had met him since the victory. We had a most excellent repast, and drank the health of the Future in some of his oldest port. Only when we had drawn up to the blazing wood fire in that softly lighted room, with our glasses beside us and two Airedales asleep at our feet, did he come round to his hobby.

"What do you think?" he said, suddenly leaning toward the flames. "Some of these blazing sentimentalists want to release our Huns. But I've put my foot on it; they won't get free till they're out of this country and back in their precious Germany." And I saw the familiar spark and smoulder in his eyes.

"Harburn," I said, moved by an impulse which I couldn't resist, "I think you ought to take a pill."

He stared at me.

"This way madness lies," I went on. "Hate is a damned insidious disease, men's souls can't stand very much of it, you know. You want purging."

He laughed.

"Hate! I thrive on it. The more I hate the brutes the better I feel. Here's to the death of every cursed Hun!"

I looked at him steadily. "I often think," I said, "that there could have been no more unhappy men on earth than Cromwell's Ironsides or the red revolu-

tionaries in France when their work was over and done with."

"What's that to do with me?" he asked, amazed.

"They too smote out of hate and came to an end of their smiting. When a man's occupation is gone——"

"You're drivelling," he said sharply.

"Far from it," I answered, nettled. "Yours is a curious case, Harburn. Most of our professional Hun-haters have found it a good stunt or are merely weak sentimentalists; they can drop it easily enough when it ceases to be a good stunt or a parrot's war cry. You can't. With you it's mania, religion. When the tide ebbs and leaves you high and dry——"

He struck his fist on the arm of his chair, upsetting his glass and awakening the Airedale at his feet.

"I won't let it ebb," he said. "I'm going on with this—mark me!"

"Remember Canute!" I muttered. "May I have some more port?" I had got up to fill my glass when I saw to my astonishment that a woman was standing in the long window which opened on to the verandah. She had evidently only just come in, for she was still holding the curtain in her hand. It was Mrs. Holsteig, with her fine grey hair blown about her face, looking strange and almost ghostly in a grey gown. Harburn had not seen her, so I went quickly towards her, hoping to get her to go out again as silently and speak to me on the verandah; but she held up her hand with a gesture as if she would push me back, and said:

"Forgive my interrupting; I came to speak to that man."

Startled by the sound of her voice, Harburn jumped up and spun round towards it.

"Yes," she repeated quite quietly, "I came to speak

to you ; I came to put my curse on you. Many have put their curses on you silently ; I do so to your face. My son lies between life and death in your prison—*your* prison. Whether he lives or dies I curse you for what you have done to poor mothers and wives—to British wives and mothers. Be for ever accursed ! Good-night ! ”

She let the curtain fall and had vanished before Harburn had time to reach the window. She vanished so swiftly and silently, she had spoken so quietly, that both he and I stood rubbing our eyes and ears.

“ Pretty theatrical ! ” he said at last.

“ But quite real,” I answered slowly ; “ you have been cursed by a live Scotswoman. Look at those dogs ! ”

The two Airedales were standing stock-still with the hair bristling on their backs.

Harburn suddenly laughed, and it jarred the whole room.

“ By George ! ” he said, “ I believe that’s actionable.”

But I was not in that mood and answered tartly :

“ If it is, we are all food for judges.”

He laughed again, this time uneasily, slammed the window to, and bolted it, and sat down again in his chair.

“ He’s got the ’flu, I suppose,” he said. “ She must think me a prize sort of idiot to have come here with such tomfoolery.” But our evening was spoiled, and I took my leave almost at once. I went out into the roudy raw December night pondering deeply. Harburn had made light of it, and though I suppose no man likes being cursed to his face in the presence of a friend, I felt his skin was quite tough enough to stand it. Besides, it was too cheap and crude a way of carrying on.

Anybody can go into his neighbour's house and curse him—and no bones broken. And yet—what she had said was no doubt true—hundreds of women—of his fellow-countrywomen—must silently have put their curse on one who had been the chief compeller of their misery. Still, he had put *his* curse on the Huns and their belongings, and I felt he was man enough to take what he had given. "No," I thought, "she has only fanned the flame of his hate. But, by Jove! that's just it! Her curse has fortified my prophecy." It was *of his own state of mind* that he would perish, and she had whipped and deepened that state of mind. And, odd as it may seem, I felt sorry for him, as one is for a dog that goes mad, does what harm he can, and dies. I lay awake that night a long time thinking of him, and of that unhappy half-crazed mother, whose son lay between life and death.

Next day I went to see her, but she was up in London hovering round the cage of her son, no doubt. I heard from her, however, some days later, thanking me for coming and saying he was out of danger. But she made no allusion to that evening visit. Perhaps she was ashamed of it. Perhaps she was demented when she came and had no remembrance thereof.

Soon after this I went to Belgium to illustrate a book on Reconstruction, and found such subjects that I was not back in town till the late summer of 1919. Going into my club one day I came on Harburn in the smoking-room. The curse had not done him much harm, it seemed, for he looked the picture of health.

"Well, how are you?" I said. "You look at the top of your form."

"Never better," he replied.

"Do you remember our last evening together?"

He uttered a sort of gusty grunt and did not answer.

"That boy recovered," I said. "What's happened to him and his mother since?"

"Ironical young brute! I've just had this from him." And he handed me a letter with a Hanover post-mark.

"DEAR MR. HARBURN,

"It was only on meeting my mother here yesterday that I learned of her visit to you one evening last December. I wish to apologise for it, since it was my illness which caused her to so forget herself. I owe you a deep debt of gratitude for having been at least partly the means of giving me the most wonderful experience of my life. In that camp of sorrow—where there was sickness of mind such as I am sure you have never seen or realised, such endless, hopeless mental anguish of poor huddled creatures turning and turning on themselves year after year—I learned to forget myself and to do my little best for them. And I learned, and I hope I shall never forget it, that good will towards his fellow-creatures is all that stands between man and death in life; I was going fast the other way before I was sent there. I thank you from my heart, and beg to remain,

"Very faithfully yours,

"HAROLD HOLSTEIG."

I put it down and said :

"That's not ironical. He means it."

"Bosh!" said Harburn, with the old spark and smoulder in his eyes. "He's pulling my leg—the swinelet Hun-prig."

"He is not, Harburn; I assure you."

Harburn got up.

" He *is*; I tell you he *is*. Ah! those brutes! Well! I haven't done with them yet."

• And I heard the snap of his jaw and saw his eyes fixed fiercely on some imagined object. I changed the subject hurriedly and soon took my departure. But going down the steps an old jingle came into my head and has hardly left it since :

*" The man recovered of the bite,
The dog it was that died."*

1919.

A KNIGHT

I

AT Monte Carlo, in the spring of the year 189-, I used to notice an old fellow in a grey suit and sunburnt straw hat with a black ribbon. Every morning at eleven o'clock, he would come down to the *Place*, followed by a brindled German boarhound, walk once or twice round it, and seat himself on a bench facing the casino. There he would remain in the sun, with his straw hat tilted forward, his thin legs apart, his brown hands crossed between them, and the dog's nose resting on his knee. After an hour or more he would get up, and, stooping a little from the waist, walk slowly round the *Place* and return up hill. Just before three, he would come down again in the same clothes and go into the casino, leaving the dog outside.

One afternoon, moved by curiosity, I followed him. He passed through the hall without looking at the gambling-rooms, and went into the concert. It became my habit after that to watch for him. When he sat on the *Place* I could see him from the window of my room. The chief puzzle to me was the matter of his nationality.

His lean, short face had a skin so burnt that it looked like leather; his jaw was long and prominent, his chin pointed, and he had hollows in his cheeks. There were wrinkles across his forehead; his eyes were brown; and little white moustaches were brushed up from the corners of his lips. The back of his head

bulged out above the lines of his lean neck and high, sharp shoulders; his grey hair was cropped quite close. In the Marseilles buffet, on the journey out, I had met an Englishman, almost his counterpart in features—but somehow very different! This old fellow had nothing of the other's alert, autocratic self-sufficiency. He was quiet and undemonstrative, without looking, as it were, insulated against shocks and foreign substances. He was certainly no Frenchman. His eyes, indeed, were brown, but hazel-brown, and gentle—not the red-brown sensual eye of the Frenchman. An American? But was ever an American so passive? A German? His moustache was certainly brushed up, but in a modest, almost pathetic way, not in the least Teutonic. Nothing seemed to fit him. I gave him up, and nicknamed him "the Cosmopolitan."

Leaving at the end of April, I forgot him altogether. In the same month, however, of the following year I was again at Monte Carlo, and going one day to the concert found myself seated next this same old fellow. The orchestra was playing Meyerbeer's "Prophète," and my neighbour was asleep, snoring softly. He was dressed in the same grey suit, with the same straw hat (or one exactly like it) on his knees, and his hands crossed above it. Sleep had not disfigured him—his little white moustache was still brushed up, his lips closed; a very good and gentle expression hovered on his face. A curved mark showed on his right temple, the scar of a cut on the side of his neck, and his left hand was covered by an old glove, the little finger of which was empty. He woke up when the march was over and brisked up his moustache.

The next thing on the programme was a little thing by Poise from *Le joli Gilles*, played by Mons.

Corsanego on the violin. Happening to glance at my old neighbour, I saw a tear caught in the hollow of his cheek, and another just leaving the corner of his eye ; there was a faint smile on his lips. Then came an interval ; and while orchestra and audience were resting, I asked him if he were fond of music. He looked up without distrust, bowed, and answered in a thin, gentle voice : " Certainly. I know nothing about it, play no instrument, could never sing a note ; but—fond of it ! Who would not be ? " His English was correct enough, but with an emphasis not quite American nor quite foreign. I ventured to remark that he did not care for Meyerbeer. He smiled.

" Ah ! " he said, " I was asleep ? Too bad of me. He *is* a little noisy—I know so little about music. There is Bach, for instance. Would you believe it, he gives me no pleasure ? A great misfortune to be no musician ! " He shook his head.

I murmured, " Bach is too elevating for you perhaps."

" To me," he answered, " any music I *like* is elevating. People say some music has a bad effect on them. I never found any music that gave me a bad thought—no—no—quite the opposite ; only sometimes, as you see, I go to sleep. But what a lovely instrument the violin ! " A faint flush came on his parched cheeks. " The human soul that has left the body. A curious thing, distant bugles at night have given me the same feeling." The orchestra was now coming back, and, folding his hands, my neighbour turned his eyes towards them. When the concert was over we came out together. Waiting at the entrance was his dog.

" You have a beautiful dog ! "

" Ah ! yes. *Freda, mia cara, da su mano !* " The dog squatted on her haunches, and lifted her paw in

the vague, bored way of big dogs when requested to perform civilities. She was a lovely creature—the purest brindle, without a speck of white, and free from the unbalanced look of most dogs of her breed.

“*Basta ! basta !*” He turned to me apologetically. “We have agreed to speak Italian ; in that way I keep up the language ; astonishing the number of things that dog will understand !” I was about to take my leave, when he asked if I would walk a little way with him—“If you are free, that is.” We went up the street with Freda on the far side of her master.

“Do you never ‘play’ here ?” I asked him.

“Play ? No. It must be very interesting ; most exciting, but as a matter of fact, I can’t afford it. If one has very little, one is too nervous.”

He had stopped in front of a small hairdresser’s shop. “I live here,” he said, raising his hat again. “*Au revoir !*—unless I can offer you a glass of tea. It’s all ready. Come ! I’ve brought you out of your way ; give me the pleasure !”

I have never met a man so free from all self-consciousness, and yet so delicate and diffident—the combination is a rare one. We went up a steep staircase to a room on the second floor. My companion threw the shutters open, setting all the flies buzzing. The top of a plane-tree was on a level with the window, and all its little brown balls were dancing, quite close, in the wind. As he had promised, an urn was hissing on a table ; there was also a small brown teapot, some sugar, slices of lemon, and glasses. A bed, washstand, cupboard, tin trunk, two chairs, and a small rug were all the furniture. Above the bed a sword in a leather sheath was suspended from two nails. The photograph of a girl stood on the closed stove. My host went to the

cupboard and produced a bottle, a glass, and a second spoon. When the cork was drawn, the scent of rum escaped into the air. He sniffed at it, and dropped a teaspoonful into both glasses.

"This is a trick I learned from the Russians after Plevna; they had my little finger, so I deserved something in exchange." He looked round; his eyes, his whole face, seemed to twinkle. "I assure you it was worth it—makes all the difference. Try!" He poured off the tea.

"Had you a sympathy with the Turks?"

"The weaker side——" He paused abruptly, then added: "But it was not that." Over his face innumerable crow's-feet had suddenly appeared, his eyes twitched; he went on hurriedly, "I had to find something to do just then—it was necessary." He stared into his glass; and it was some time before I ventured to ask if he had seen much fighting.

"Yes," he replied gravely, "nearly twenty years altogether; I was one of Garibaldi's *Mille* in '60."

"Surely you are not Italian?"

He leaned forward with his hands on his knees. "I was in Genoa at that time learning banking; Garibaldi was a wonderful man! One could not help it." He spoke quite simply. "You might say it was like seeing a little man stand up to a ring of great hulking fellows; I went, just as you would have gone, if you'd been there. I was not long with them—~~our~~ war began; I had to go back home." He said this as if there had been but one war since the world began. "In '61," he mused, "till '65. Just think of it! The poor country. Why, in my State, South Carolina—I was through it all—nobody could be spared there—we were one to three."

"I suppose you have a love of fighting?"

"H'm!" he said, as if considering the idea for the first time. "Sometimes I fought for a living, and sometimes—because I was obliged; one must try to be a gentleman. But won't you have some more?"

I refused more tea and took my leave, carrying away with me a picture of the old fellow looking down from the top of the steep staircase, one hand pressed to his back, the other twisting up those little white moustaches and murmuring, "Take care, my dear sir, there's a step there at the corner."

"To be a gentleman!" I repeated in the street, causing an old French lady to drop her parasol, so that for about two minutes we stood bowing and smiling to each other, then separated full of the best feeling.

II

A week later I found myself again seated next him at a concert. In the meantime I had seen him now and then, but only in passing. He seemed depressed. The corners of his lips were tightened, his tanned cheeks had a greyish tinge, his eyes were restless; and, between two numbers of the programme, he murmured, tapping his fingers on his hat, "Do you ever have bad days? Yes? Not pleasant, are they?"

Then something occurred from which all that I have to tell you followed. There came into the concert-hall the heroine of one of those romances, crimes, follies, or irregularities, call it what you will, which had just attracted the "world's" stare. She passed us with her partner, and sat down in a chair a few rows to our right. She kept turning her head round, and at every

turn I caught the gleam of her uneasy eyes. Some one behind us said : " The brazen baggage ! "

My companion turned full round, and glared at whoever it was who had spoken. The change in him was quite remarkable. His lips were drawn back from his teeth ; he frowned ; the scar on his temple had reddened.

" Ah ! " he said to me. " The hue and cry ! Contemptible ! How I hate it ! But you wouldn't understand—I——" he broke off, and slowly regained his usual air of self-obliteration ; he even seemed ashamed, and began trying to brush his moustaches higher than ever, as if aware that his heat had robbed them of neatness.

" I'm not myself, when I speak of such matters," he said suddenly ; and began reading his programme, holding it upside down. A minute later, however, he said in a peculiar voice : " There are people to be found who object to vivisectioning animals ; but the vivisection of a woman, who minds that ? Will you tell me it's right, that because of some tragedy like this—believe me, it is always a tragedy—we should hunt down a woman ? That her fellow-women should make an outcast of her ? That we who are *men* should make a prey of her ? If I thought that——" Again he broke off, staring very hard in front of him. " It is *we* who make them what they are ; and even if that is not so—why ! if I thought there was a woman in the world I could not take my hat off to—I—I—couldn't sleep at night." He got up from his seat, put on his old straw hat with trembling fingers, and, without a glance back, went out, stumbling over the chair-legs.

I sat there, horribly disturbed ; the words, " One must try to be a gentleman ! " haunting me. When

I came out, he was standing by the entrance with one hand on his hip and the other on his dog. In that attitude of waiting he was such a patient figure; the sun glared down and showed the threadbare nature of his clothes and the thinness of his brown hands, with their long fingers and nails yellow from tobacco. Seeing me he came up the steps again, and raised his hat.

"I am glad to have caught you; please forget all that." I asked if he would do me the honour of dining at my hotel.

"Dine?" he repeated with the sort of smile a child gives if you offer him a box of soldiers; "with the greatest pleasure. I seldom dine out, but I think I can muster up a coat. Yes—yes—and at what time shall I come? At half-past seven, and your hotel is——? Good! I shall be there. *Freda, mia cara*, you will be alone this evening. You do not smoke *caporal*, I fear. I find it fairly good; though it has too much bite." He walked off with Freda, puffing at his thin roll of *caporal*.

Once or twice he stopped, as if bewildered or beset by some sudden doubt or memory; and every time he stopped, Freda licked his hand. They disappeared round the corner of the street, and I went to my hotel to see about dinner. On the way I met Jules le Ferrier, and asked him to come too.

"My faith, yes!" he said with the rosy pessimism characteristic of the French editor. "Man must dine!"

At half-past six we assembled. My "Cosmopolitan" was in an old frock-coat braided round the edges, buttoned high and tight, defining more than ever the sharp lines of his shoulders and the slight kink of his back; he had brought with him, too, a dark-

peaked cap of military shape, which he had evidently selected as more fitting to the coat than a straw hat. He smelled slightly of some herb.

We sat down to dinner, and did not rise for two hours. He was a charming guest, praised everything he ate—not with commonplaces, but in words that made you feel it had given him real pleasure. At first, whenever Jules made one of his caustic remarks, he looked quite pained, but suddenly seemed to make up his mind that it was bark, not bite; and then at each of them he would turn to me and say, "Aha! that's good—isn't it?" With every glass of wine he became more gentle and more genial, sitting very upright, and tightly buttoned-in; while the little white wings of his moustache seemed about to leave him for a better world.

In spite of the most leading questions, however, we could not get him to talk about himself, for even Jules, most cynical of men, had recognised that he was a hero of romance. He would answer gently and precisely, and then sit twisting his moustaches, perfectly unconscious that we wanted more. Presently, as the wine went a little to his head, his thin, high voice grew thinner, his cheeks became flushed, his eyes brighter; at the end of dinner he said: "I hope I have not been noisy."

We assured him that he had not been noisy enough. "You're laughing at me," he answered. "Surely I've been talking all the time!"

"*Mon Dieu!*" said Jules, "we have been looking for some fables of your wars; but nothing—nothing, not enough to feed a frog!"

The old fellow looked troubled.

"To be sure!" he mused. "Let me think! there

is that about Colhoun at Gettysburg ; and there's the story of Garibaldi and the Miller." He plunged into a tale, not at all about himself, which would have been extremely dull, but for the conviction in his eyes, and the way he stopped and commented. " So you see," he ended, " that's the sort of man Garibaldi was ! I could tell you another tale of him." Catching an introspective look in Jules's eye, however, I proposed taking our cigars over to the *café* opposite.

" Delightful ! " the old fellow said : " We shall have a band and the fresh air, and clear consciences for our cigars. I cannot like this smoking in a room where there are ladies dining."

He walked out in front of us, smoking with an air of great enjoyment. Jules, glowing above his candid shirt and waistcoat, whispered to me, " Mon cher Georges, how he is good ! " then sighed, and added darkly : " The poor man ! "

We sat down at a little table. Close by, the branches of a plane-tree rustled faintly ; their leaves hung lifeless, speckled like the breasts of birds, or black against the sky ; then, caught by the breeze, fluttered suddenly.

The old fellow sat, with head thrown back, a smile on his face, coming now and then out of his enchanted dreams to drink coffee, answer our questions, or hum the tune that the band was playing. The ash of his cigar grew very long. One of those bizarre figures in Oriental garb, who, night after night, offer their doubtful wares at a great price, appeared in the white glare of a lamp, looked with a furtive smile at his face, and glided back, discomfited by its unconsciousness. It was a night for dreams ! A faint, half-eastern scent in the air, of black tobacco and spice ; few people as yet at the little tables, the waiters leisurely,

the band soft ! What was he dreaming of, that old fellow, whose cigar-ash grew so long ? Of youth, of his battles, of those things that must be done by those who try to be gentlemen ; perhaps only of his dinner ; anyway of something gilded in vague fashion as the light was gilding the branches of the plane-tree.

Jules pulled my sleeve : " He sleeps." He had smilingly dropped off ; the cigar-ash—that feathery tower of his dreams—had broken and fallen on his sleeve. He awoke, and fell to dusting it.

The little tables round us began to fill. One of the bandsmen played a czardas on the cymbal. Two young Frenchmen, talking loudly, sat down at the adjoining table. They were discussing the lady who had been at the concert that afternoon.

" It's a bet," said one of them, " but there's the present man. I take three weeks, that's enough—*elle est déclassée ; ce n'est que le premier pas*——"

My old friend's cigar fell on the table. " Monsieur," he stammered, " you speak of a lady so, in a public place ? "

The young man stared at him. " Who is this person ? " he said to his companion.

My guest took up Jules's glove that lay on the table ; before either of us could raise a finger, he had swung it in the speaker's face. " Enough ! " he said, and, dropping the glove, walked away.

We all jumped to our feet. I left Jules and hurried after him. His face was grim, his eyes those of a creature who has been struck on a raw place. He made a movement of his fingers which said plainly. " Leave me, if you please ! "

I went back to the *café*. The two young men had disappeared, so had Jules, but everything else was

going on just as before ; the bandsman still twanging out his czardas ; the waiters serving drinks ; the orientals trying to sell their carpets. I paid the bill, sought out the manager, and apologised. He shrugged his shoulders, smiled and said : " An eccentric, your friend, *nicht wahr ?* " Could he tell me where M. le Ferrier was ? He could not. I left to look for Jules ; could not find him, and returned to my hotel disgusted. I was sorry for my old guest, but vexed with him too ; what business had he to carry his Quixotism to such an unpleasant length ? I tried to read. Eleven o'clock struck ; the casino disgorged a stream of people ; the *Place* seemed fuller of life than ever ; then slowly it grew empty and quite dark. The whim seized me to go out. It was a still night, very warm, very black. On one of the seats a man and woman sat embraced, on another a girl was sobbing, on a third—strange sight—a priest dozed. I became aware of some one at my side ; it was my old guest.

" If you are not too tired," he said, " can you give me ten minutes ? "

" Certainly ; will you come in ? "

" No, no ; let us go down to the Terrace. I shan't keep you long. "

He did not speak again till we reached a seat above the pigeon-shooting grounds ; there, in a darkness denser for the string of lights still burning in the town, we sat down.

" I owe you an apology," he said ; " first in the afternoon, then again this evening—your guest—your friend's glove ! I have behaved as no gentleman should. " He was leaning forward with his hands on the handle of a stick. His voice sounded broken and disturbed.

"Oh!" I muttered. "It's nothing!"

"You are very good," he sighed; "but I feel that I must explain. I consider I owe this to you, but I must tell you I should not have the courage if it were not for another reason. You see I have no friend." He looked at me with an uncertain smile. I bowed, and a minute or two later he began. . . .

III

"You will excuse me if I go back rather far. It was in '74, when I had been ill with Cuban fever. To keep me alive they had put me on board a ship at Santiago, and at the end of the voyage I found myself in London. I had very little money; I knew nobody. I tell you, sir, there are times when it's hard for a fighting man to get anything to do. People would say to me: 'Afraid we've nothing for a man like you in our business.' I tried people of all sorts; but it was true—I had been fighting here and there since '60, I wasn't fit for anything——" He shook his head. "In the South, before the war, they had a saying, I remember, about a dog and a soldier having the same value. But all this has nothing to do with what I have to tell you." He sighed again and went on, moistening his lips: "I was walking along the Strand one day, very disheartened, when I heard my name called. It's a queer thing, that, in a strange street. By the way," he put in with dry ceremony, "you don't know my name, I think: it is Brune—Roger Brune. At first I did not recognise the person who called me. He had just got off an omnibus—a square-shouldered man with heavy moustaches, and round spectacles. But when he shook

my hand I knew him at once. He was a man called Dalton, who was taken prisoner at Gettysburg; one of you Englishmen who came to fight with us—a major in the regiment where I was captain. We were comrades during two campaigns. If I had been his brother he couldn't have seemed more pleased to see me. He took me into a bar for the sake of old times. The drink went to my head, and by the time we reached Trafalgar Square I was quite unable to walk. He made me sit down on a bench. I was in fact—drunk. It's disgraceful to be drunk, but there was some excuse. Now I tell you, sir ” (all through his story he was always making use of that expression, it seemed to infuse fresh spirit into him, to help his memory in obscure places, to give him the mastery of his emotions; it was like the piece of paper a nervous man holds in his hand to help him through a speech), “ there never was a man with a finer soul than my friend Dalton. He was not clever, though he had read much; and sometimes perhaps he was too fond of talking. But he was a gentleman; he listened to me as if I had been a child; he was not ashamed of me—and it takes a gentleman not to be ashamed of a drunken man in the streets of London; God knows what things I said to him while we were sitting there! He took me to his home and put me to bed himself; for I was down again 'with fever.” He stopped, turned slightly from me, and put his hand up to his brow. “ Well, then it was, sir, that I first saw her. I am not a poet and I cannot tell you what she seemed to me. I was delirious, but I always knew when she was there. I had dreams of sunshine and cornfields, of dancing waves at sea, young trees—never the same dreams, never anything for long together; and when I had my senses I was afraid to say

so for fear she would go away. She'd be in the corner of the room, with her hair hanging about her neck, a bright gold colour; she never worked and never read, but sat and talked to herself in a whisper, or looked at me for a long time together out of her blue eyes, a little frown between them, and her upper lip closed firm on her lower lip, where she had an uneven tooth. When her father came, she'd jump up and hang on to his neck until he groaned, then run away, but presently come stealing back on tiptoe. I used to listen for her footsteps on the stairs, then the knock, the door flung back or opened quietly—you never could tell which; and her voice, with a little lisp, 'Are you better to-day, Mr. Brune? What funny things you say when you're delirious! Father says you've been in heaps of battles!'"

He got up, paced restlessly to and fro, and sat down again. "I remember every word as if it were yesterday, all the things she said, and did; I've had a long time to think them over, you see. Well, I must tell you, the first morning that I was able to get up, I missed her. Dalton came in her place, and I asked him where she was. 'My dear fellow,' he answered, 'I've sent Eilie away to her old nurse's inn down on the river; she's better there at this time of year.' We looked at each other, and I saw that he had sent her away because he didn't trust me. I was hurt by this. Illness spoils one. He was right, he was quite right, for all he knew about me was that I could fight and had got drunk; but I am very quick-tempered. I made up my mind at once to leave him. But I was too weak—he had to put me to bed again. The very next morning he came and proposed that I should go into partnership with him. He kept a fencing-school and pistol-gallery. It

seemed like the finger of God ; and it was perhaps—who knows ? ” He fell into a reverie, and taking out his *caporal*, rolled himself a cigarette ; having lighted it, he went on suddenly : “ There, in the room above the school, we used to sit in the evenings, one on each side of the grate. The room was on the second floor, I remember, with two windows, and a view of nothing but the houses opposite. The furniture was covered up with chintz. The things on the bookshelf were never disturbed, they were Eilie’s—half-broken cases with butterflies, a dead frog in a bottle, a horse-shoe covered with tinfoil, some shells too, and a cardboard box with three speckled eggs in it, and these words written on the lid : ‘ Missel-thrush from Lucy’s tree—second family, only one blown.’ ” He smoked fiercely, with puffs that were like sharp sighs.

“ Dalton was wrapped up in her. He was never tired of talking to me about her, and I was never tired of hearing. We had a number of pupils ; but in the evening when we sat there, smoking—our talk would sooner or later come round to her. Her bedroom opened out of that sitting-room ; he took me in once and showed me a narrow little room the width of a passage, fresh and white, with a photograph of her mother above the bed, and an empty basket for a dog or cat.” He broke off with a vexed air, and resumed sternly, as if trying to bind himself to the narration of his more important facts : “ She was then fifteen—her mother had been dead twelve years—a beautiful face, her mother’s ; it had been her death that sent Dalton to fight with us. Well, sir, one day in August, very hot weather, he proposed a run into the country, and who should meet us on the platform when we arrived but Eilie, in a blue sun-bonnet and frock—flax blue,

her favourite colour. I was angry with Dalton for not telling me that we should see her ; my clothes were not quite—my hair wanted cutting. It was black then, sir,” he added, tracing a pattern in the darkness with his stick. “ She had a little donkey-cart ; she drove, and, while we walked one on each side, she kept looking at me from under her sun-bonnet. I must tell you that she never laughed—her eyes danced, her cheeks would go pink, and her hair shake about on her neck, but she never laughed. Her old nurse, Lucy, a very broad, good woman, had married the proprietor of the inn in the village there. I have never seen anything like that inn : sweetbriar up to the roof ! And the scent—I am very susceptible to scents ! ” His head drooped, and the cigarette fell from his hand. A train passing beneath sent up a shower of sparks. He started, and went on : “ We had our lunch in the parlour—I remember that room very well, for I spent the happiest days of my life afterwards in that inn. . . . We went into a meadow after lunch, and my friend Dalton fell asleep. A wonderful thing happened then. Ellie whispered to me, ‘ Let’s have a jolly time.’ She took me for the most glorious walk. The river was close by. A lovely stream, your river Thames, so calm and broad ; it is like the spirit of your people. I was bewitched ; I forgot my friend, I thought of nothing but how to keep her to myself. It was such a day ! There are days that are the devil’s, but that was truly one of God’s. She took me to a little pond under an elm-tree, and we dragged it, we two, an hour, for a kind of tiny red worm to feed some creature that she had. We found them in the mud, and while she was bending over, the curls got in her eyes. If you could have seen her then, I think, sir, you would have said

she was like the first sight of spring. . . . We had tea afterwards, all together, in the long grass under some fruit-trees. If I had the knack of words, there are 'things that I could say——' He bent, as though in deference to those unspoken memories. "Twilight came on while we were sitting there. A wonderful thing is twilight in the country! It became time for us to go. There was an avenue of trees close by—like a church with a window at the end, where golden light came through. I walked up and down it with her. 'Will you come again?' she whispered, and suddenly she lifted up her face to be kissed. I kissed her as if she were a little child. And when we said good-bye, her eyes were looking at me across her father's shoulder, with surprise and sorrow in them. 'Why do you go away?' they seemed to say. . . . But I must tell you," he went on hurriedly, "of a thing that happened before we had gone a hundred yards. We were smoking our pipes, and I, thinking of her—when out she sprang from the hedge and stood in front of us. Dalton cried out, 'What are you here for again, you mad girl?' She rushed up to him and hugged him; but when she looked at me, her face was quite different—careless, defiant, as one might say—it hurt me. I couldn't understand it, and what one doesn't understand frightens one."

IV

"Time went on. There was no swordsman, or pistol-shot like me in London, they said. We had as many pupils as we liked—it was the only part of my life when I have been able to save money. I had no chance to spend it. We gave lessons all day, and in

the evening were too tired to go out. That year I had the misfortune to lose my dear mother. I became a rich man—yes, sir, at that time I must have had not less than six hundred a year.

“It was a long time before I saw Eilie again. She went abroad to Dresden with her father’s sister to learn French and German. It was in the autumn of 1875 when she came back to us. She was seventeen then—a beautiful young creature.” He paused, as if to gather his forces for description, and went on.

“Tall, as a young tree, with eyes like the sky. I would not say she was perfect, but her imperfections were beautiful to me. What is it makes you love—ah! sir, that is very hidden and mysterious. She had never lost the trick of closing her lips tightly when she remembered her uneven tooth. You may say that was vanity, but in a young girl—and which of us is not vain, eh? ‘Old men and maidens, young men and children!’

“As I said, she came back to London to her little room, and in the evenings was always ready with our tea. You mustn’t suppose she was housewifely; there is something in me that never admired housewifeliness—a fine quality, no doubt, still——” He sighed.

“No,” he resumed, “Eilie was not like that, for she was never quite the same two days together. I told you her eyes were like the sky—that was true of all of her. In one thing, however, at that time, she always seemed the same—in love for her father. For me! I don’t know what I should have expected; but my presence seemed to have the effect of making her dumb; I would catch her looking at me with a frown, and then, as if to make up to her own nature—and a more

loving nature never came into this world, that I shall maintain to my dying day—she would go to her father and kiss him. When I talked with him she pretended not to notice, but I could see her face grow cold and stubborn. I am not quick; and it was a long time before I understood that she was jealous, she wanted him all to herself. I've often wondered how she could be his daughter, for he was the very soul of justice and a slow man too—and she was as quick as a bird. For a long time after I saw her dislike of me, I refused to believe it—if one does not want to believe a thing there are always reasons why it should not seem true, at least so it is with me, and I suppose with all selfish men.

“I spent evening after evening there, when, if I had not thought only of myself, I should have kept away. But one day I could no longer be blind.

“It was a Sunday in February. I always had an invitation on Sundays to dine with them in the middle of the day. There was no one in the sitting-room; but the door of Eilie's bedroom was open. I heard her voice: ‘That man, always that man!’ It was enough for me, I went down again without coming in, and walked about all day.

“For three weeks I kept away. To the school of course I came as usual, but not upstairs. I don't know what I told Dalton—it did not signify what you told him, he always had a theory of his own, and was persuaded of its truth—a very single-minded man, sir.

“But now I come to the most wonderful days of my life. It was an early spring that year. I had fallen away already from my resolution, and used to slink up—seldom, it's true—and spend the evening with them as before. One afternoon I came up to the sitting-room; the light was failing—it was warm, and the

windows were open. In the air was that feeling which comes to you once a year, in the spring, no matter where you may be, in a crowded street, or alone in a forest; only once—a feeling like—but I cannot describe it.

"Eilie was sitting there. If you don't know, sir, I can't tell you what it means to be near the woman one loves. She was leaning on the window-sill, staring down into the street. It was as though she might be looking out for some one. I stood, hardly breathing. She turned her head, and saw me. Her eyes were strange. They seemed to ask me a question. But I couldn't have spoken for the world. I can't tell you what I felt—I dared not speak, or think, or hope. I have been in nineteen battles—several times in positions of some danger, when the lifting of a finger perhaps meant death; but I have never felt what I was feeling at that moment. I knew something was coming; and I was paralysed with terror lest it should not come!" He drew a long breath.

"The servant came in with a light and broke the spell. All that night I lay awake and thought of how she had looked at me, with the colour coming slowly up in her cheeks.

"It was three days before I plucked up courage to go again; and then I felt her eyes on me at once—she was making a 'cat's cradle' with a bit of string, but I could see them stealing up from her hands to my face. And she went wandering about the room, fingering at everything. When her father called out: 'What's the matter with you, Eilie?' she stared at him like a child caught doing wrong. I looked straight at her then, she tried to look at me, but she couldn't; and a minute later she went out of the room. God

knows what sort of nonsense I talked—I was too happy.

“Then began our love. I can’t tell you of that time. Often and often Dalton said to me: ‘What’s come to the child? Nothing I can do pleases her.’ All the love she had given him was now for me; but he was too simple and straight to see what was going on. How many times haven’t I felt criminal towards him! But when you’re happy, with the tide in your favour, you become a coward at once. . . .

V

“Well, sir,” he went on, “we were married on her eighteenth birthday. It was a long time before Dalton became aware of our love. But one day he said to me with a very grave look :

“‘Eilie has told me, Brune; I forbid it. She’s too young, and you’re—too old!’ I was then forty-five, my hair as black and thick as a rook’s feathers, and I was strong and active. I answered him: ‘We shall be married within a month!’ We parted in anger. It was a May night, and I walked out far into the country. There’s no remedy for anger, or, indeed for anything, so fine as walking. Once I stopped—it was on a common, without a house or light, and the stars shining like jewels. I was hot from walking, I could feel the blood boiling in my veins—I said to myself: ‘Old, are you?’ And I laughed like a fool. It was the thought of losing her—I wished to believe myself angry, but really I was afraid; fear and anger in me are very much the same. A friend of mine, a bit of a poet, sir, once called them ‘the two black wings

of self.' And so they are, so they are ! . . . The next morning I went to Dalton again, and somehow I made him yield. I'm not a philosopher, but it has often seemed to me that no benefit can come to us in this life without an equal loss somewhere, but does that stop us ? No, sir, not often. . . .

"We were married on the 30th of June, 1876, in the parish church. The only people present were Dalton, Lucy, and Lucy's husband—a big, red-faced fellow, with blue eyes and a golden beard parted in two. It had been arranged that we should spend the honeymoon down at their inn on the river. My wife, Dalton and I, went to a restaurant for lunch. She was dressed in grey, the colour of a pigeon's feathers." He paused, leaning forward over the crutch handle of his stick ; trying to conjure up, no doubt, that long-ago image of his young bride in her dress "the colour of a pigeon's feathers," with her blue eyes and yellow hair, the little frown between her brows, the firmly shut red lips, opening to speak the words, "For better, for worse, for richer, for poorer, in sickness and in health."

"At that time, sir," he went on suddenly, "I was a bit of a dandy. I wore, I remember, a blue frock-coat, with white trousers, and a grey top hat. Even now I should always prefer to be well dressed. . . .

"We had an excellent lunch, and drank Veuve Clicquot, a wine that you cannot get in these days ! Dalton came with us to the railway station. I can't bear partings ; and yet, they must come.

"That evening we walked out in the cool under the aspen-trees. What should I remember in all my life if not that night—the young bullocks snuffing in the gateways—the campion flowers all lighted up along the hedges—the moon with a halo—bats, too, in and out

among the stems, and the shadows of the cottages as black and soft as that sea down there. For a long time we stood on the river-bank beneath a lime-tree. The scent of the lime flowers! A man can only endure about half his joy; about half his sorrow. Lucy and her husband," he went on, presently, "his name was Frank Tor—a man like an old Viking, who ate nothing but milk, bread, and fruit—were very good to us! It was like Paradise in that inn—though the commissariat, I am bound to say, was limited. The sweetbriar grew round our bedroom windows; when the breezes blew the leaves across the opening—it was like a bath of perfume. Eilie grew as brown as a gipsy while we were there. I don't think any man could have loved her more than I did. But there were times when my heart stood still; it didn't seem as if she understood how much I loved her. One day, I remember, she coaxed me to take her camping. We drifted downstream all the afternoon, and in the evening pulled into the reeds under the willow-boughs and lit a fire for her to cook by—though, as a matter of fact, our provisions were cooked already—but you know how it is; all the romance was in having a real fire. 'We won't pretend,' she kept saying. While we were eating our supper a hare came to our clearing—a big fellow—how surprised he looked! 'The tall hare,' Eilie called him. After that we sat by the ashes and watched the shadows, till at last she roamed away from me. The time went very slowly; I got up to look for her. It was past sundown. I called and called. It was a long time before I found her—and she was like a wild thing, hot and flushed, her pretty frock torn, her hands and face scratched, her hair down, like some beautiful creature of the woods. If one loves, a little thing will

scare one. I didn't think she had noticed my fright ; but when we got back to the boat she threw her arms round my neck, and said, ' I won't ever leave you again ! '

" Once in the night I woke—a water-hen was crying, and in the moonlight a kingfisher flew across. The wonder on the river—the wonder of the moon and trees, the soft bright mist, the stillness ! It was like another world, peaceful, enchanted, far holier than ours. It seemed like a vision of the thoughts that come to one—how seldom ! and go if one tries to grasp them. Magic—poetry—sacred ! " He was silent a minute, then went on in a wistful voice : " I looked at her, sleeping like a child, with her hair loose, and her lips apart, and I thought : ' God do so to me, if ever I bring her pain ! ' How was I to understand her ? the mystery and innocence of her soul !—The river has had all my light and all my darkness, the happiest days, and the hours when I've despaired ; and I like to think of it, for, you know, in time bitter memories fade, only the good remain. . . . Yet the good have their own pain, a different kind of aching, for we shall never get them back. Sir," he said, turning to me with a faint smile, " it's no use crying over spilt milk. . . . In the neighbourhood of Lucy's inn, the Rose and Maybush— Can you imagine a prettier name ? I have been all over the world, and nowhere found names so pretty as in the English country. There, too, every blade of grass, and flower, has a kind of pride about it ; knows it will be cared for ; and all the roads, trees, and cottages, seem to be certain that they will live for ever. . . . But I was going to tell you : Half a mile from the inn was a quiet old house which we used to call the ' Convent '—though I believe it was a farm.

We spent many afternoons there, trespassing in the orchard—Eilie was fond of trespassing; if there were a long way round across somebody else's property, she would always take it. We spent our last afternoon in that orchard, lying in the long grass. I was reading *Childe Harold* for the first time—a wonderful, memorable poem! I was at that passage—the bullfight—you remember:

“ ‘ *Thrice sounds the clarion; lo! the signal falls,
The din expands, and expectation mute* ’—

when suddenly Eilie said: ‘ Suppose I were to leave off loving you?’ It was as if some one had struck me in the face. I jumped up, and tried to take her in my arms, but she slipped away; then she turned, and began laughing softly. I laughed too. I don’t know why. . . .

VI

“ We went back to London the next day; we lived quite close to the school, and about five days a week Dalton came to dine with us. He would have come every day, if he had not been the sort of man who refuses to consult his own pleasure. We had more pupils than ever. In my leisure I taught my wife to fence. I have never seen any one so lithe and quick; or so beautiful as she looked in her fencing dress, with embroidered shoes.

“ I was completely happy. When a man has obtained his desire he becomes careless and self-satisfied; I was watchful, however, for I knew that I was naturally a selfish man. I studied to arrange my time and save

my money, to give her as much pleasure as I could. What she loved best in the world just then was riding. I bought a horse for her, and in the evenings of the spring and summer we rode together; but when it was too dark to go out late, she would ride alone, great distances, sometimes spend the whole day in the saddle, and come back so tired she could hardly walk upstairs—I can't say that I liked that. It made me nervous, she was so headlong—but I didn't think it right to interfere with her. I had a good deal of anxiety about money, for though I worked hard and made more than ever, there never seemed enough. I was anxious to save—I hoped, of course—but we had no child, and this was a trouble to me. She grew more beautiful than ever, and I think was happy. Has it ever struck you that each one of us lives on the edge of a volcano? There is, I imagine, no one who has not some affection or interest so strong that he counts the rest for nothing, beside it. No doubt a man may live his life through without discovering that. But some of us——! I am not complaining; what is—is.” He pulled the cap lower over his eyes, and clutched his hands firmly on the top of his stick. He was like a man who rushed his horse at some hopeless fence, unwilling to give himself time, for fear of craning at the last moment. “In the spring of '78, a new pupil came to me, a young man of twenty-one who was destined for the army. I took a fancy to him, and did my best to turn him into a good swordsman; but there was a kind of perverse recklessness in him; for a few minutes one would make a great impression, then he would grow utterly careless. ‘Francis,’ I would say, ‘if I were you I should be ashamed.’ ‘Mr. Brune,’ he would answer, ‘why should I be ashamed? I didn't make myself.’ God

knows, I wish to do him justice, he had a heart—one day he drove up in a cab, and brought in his poor dog, who had been run over, and was dying. For half an hour he shut himself up with its body, we could hear him sobbing like a child; he came out with his eyes all red, and cried: ‘I know where to find the brute who drove over him,’ and off he rushed. He had beautiful Italian eyes; a slight figure, not very tall; dark hair, a little dark moustache; and his lips were always a trifle parted—it was that, and his walk, and the way he drooped his eyelids, which gave him a peculiar, soft, proud look. I used to tell him that he’d never make a soldier! ‘Oh!’ he’d answer, ‘that’ll be all right when the time comes!’ He believed in a kind of luck that was to do everything for him, when the time came. One day he came in as I was giving Eilie her lesson. This was the first time they saw each other. After that he came more often, and sometimes stayed to dinner with us. I won’t deny, sir, that I was glad to welcome him; I thought it good for Eilie. Can there be anything more odious,” he burst out, “than such a self-complacent blindness? There are people who say, ‘Poor man, he had such faith!’ Faith, sir! Conceit! I was a fool—in this world one pays for folly. . . .

“The summer came; and one Saturday in early June, Eilie, I, and Francis—I won’t tell you his other name—went riding. The night had been wet; there was no dust, and presently the sun came out—a glorious day! We rode a long way. About seven o’clock we started back—slowly, for it was still hot, and there was all the cool of night before us. It was nine o’clock when we came to Richmond Park. A grand place, Richmond Park; and in that half-light wonderful,

the deer moving so softly, you might have thought they were spirits. We were silent too—great trees have that effect on me. . . .

"Who can say when changes come? Like a shift of the wind, the old passes, the new is on you. I am telling you now of a change like that. Without a sign of warning, Eilie put her horse into a gallop. 'What are you doing?' I shouted. She looked back with a smile, then he dashed past me too. A hornet might have stung them both: they galloped over fallen trees, under low-hanging branches, up hill and down. I had to watch that madness! My horse was not so fast. I rode like a demon; but fell far behind. I am not a man who takes things quietly. When I came up with them at last, I could not speak for rage. They were riding side by side, the reins on the horses' necks, looking in each other's faces. 'You should take care,' I said. 'Care!' she cried; 'life is not all taking care!' My anger left me. I dropped behind, as grooms ride behind their mistresses. . . . Jealousy! No torture is so ceaseless or so black. . . . In those minutes a hundred things came up in me—a hundred memories, true, untrue, what do I know? My soul was poisoned. I tried to reason with myself. It was absurd to think such things! It was unmanly. . . . Even if it were true, one should try to be a gentleman! But I found myself laughing; yes, sir, laughing at that word." He spoke faster, as if pouring his heart out not to a live listener, but to the night. "I could not sleep that night. To lie near her with those thoughts in my brain was impossible! I made an excuse, and sat up with some papers. The hardest thing in life is to see a thing coming and be able to do nothing to prevent it. What could I do? Have you noticed how people

may become utter strangers without a word? It only needs a thought. . . . The very next day she said: 'I want to go to Lucy's,' 'Alone?' 'Yes.' I had made up my mind by then that she must do just as she wished. Perhaps I acted wrongly; I do not know what one ought to do in such a case; but before she went I said to her: 'Ellie, what is it?' 'I don't know,' she answered; and I kissed her—that was all. . . . A month passed; I wrote to her nearly every day, and I had short letters from her, telling me very little of herself. Dalton was a torture to me, for I could not tell him; he had a conviction that she was going to become a mother. 'Ah, Brune!' he said, 'my poor wife was just like that.' Life, sir, is a somewhat ironical affair! . . . He—I find it hard to speak his name—came to the school two or three times a week. I used to think I saw a change, a purpose growing up through his recklessness; there seemed a violence in him as if he chafed against my blade. I had a kind of joy in feeling I had the mastery, and could toss the iron out of his hand any minute like a straw. I was ashamed, and yet I gloried in it. Jealousy is a low thing, sir—a low, base thing! When he asked me where my wife was, I told him; I was too proud to hide it. Soon after that he came no more to the school.

"One morning, when I could bear it no longer, I wrote, and said I was coming down. I would not force myself on her, but I asked her to meet me in the orchard of the old house we called the Convent. I asked her to be there at four o'clock. It has always been my belief that a man must neither beg anything of a woman, nor force anything from her. Women are generous—they will give you what they can. I scaled

my letter, and posted it myself. All the way down I kept on saying to myself, 'She must come—surely she will come!'

VII

"I was in high spirits, but the next moment trembled like a man with ague. I reached the orchard before my time. She was not there. You know what it is like to wait? I stood still and listened; I went to the point whence I could see farthest; I said to myself, 'A watched pot never boils; if I don't look for her she will come.' I walked up and down with my eyes on the ground. The sickness of it! A hundred times I took out my watch. Perhaps it was fast, perhaps hers was slow—I can't tell you a thousandth part of my hopes and fears. There was a spring of water in one corner. I sat beside it, and thought of the last time I had been there—and something seemed to burst in me. It was five o'clock before I lost all hope; there comes a time when you're glad that hope is dead, it means rest. 'That's over,' you say, 'now I can act.' But what was I to do? I lay down with my face to the ground; when one's in trouble, it's the only thing that helps—something to press against and cling to that can't give way. I lay there for two hours, knowing all the time that I should play the coward. At seven o'clock I left the orchard and went towards the inn; I had broken my word, but I felt happy. I should see her—and, sir, nothing—nothing seemed to matter beside that. Tor was in the garden snipping at his roses. He came up, and I could see that he couldn't look me in the face. 'Where's my wife?' I said. He answered, 'Let's get Lucy.' I ran indoors. Lucy

met me with two letters; the first—my own—unopened; and the second, this :—

“ ‘ I have left you. You were good to me, but now—it is no use.

EILIE.’

“ She told me that a boy had brought a letter for my wife the day before, from a young gentleman in a boat. When Lucy delivered it she asked, ‘ Who is he, Miss Eilie? What will Mr. Brune say?’ My wife looked at her angrily, but gave her no answer—and all that day she never spoke. In the evening she was gone, leaving this note on the bed. . . . Lucy cried as if her heart would break. I took her by the shoulders and put her from the room; I couldn’t bear the noise. I sat down and tried to think. While I was sitting there Tor came in with a letter. It was written on the notepaper of an inn twelve miles up the river: these were the words :—

“ ‘ Eilie is mine. I am ready to meet you where you like.’ ”

He went on with a painful evenness of speech. “ When I read those words, I had only one thought—to reach them; I ran down to the river, and chose out the lightest boat. Just as I was starting, Tor came running. ‘ You dropped this letter, sir,’ he said. ‘ Two pair of arms are better than one.’ He came into the boat. I took the sculls and I pulled out into the stream. I pulled like a madman; and that great man, with his bare arms crossed, was like a huge, tawny bull sitting there opposite me. Presently he took my place,

and I took the rudder lines. I could see his chest, covered with hair, heaving up and down, it gave me a sort of comfort—it meant that we were getting nearer. Then it grew dark, there was no moon, I could barely see the bank; there's something in the dark which drives one into oneself. People tell you there comes a moment when your nature is decided—'saved' or 'lost' as they call it—for good or evil. That is not true, your self is always with you, and cannot be altered; but, sir, I believe that in a time of agony one finds out what are the things one can do, and what are those one cannot. You get to *know* yourself, that's all. And so it was with me. Every thought and memory and passion was so clear and strong! I wanted to kill him. I wanted to kill myself. But her—no! We are taught that we possess our wives, body and soul, we are brought up in that faith, we are commanded to believe it—but when I was face to face with it, those words had no meaning; that belief, those commands, they were without meaning to me, they were—vile. Oh yes, I *wanted* to find comfort in them, I *wanted* to hold on to them—but I couldn't. You may force a body; how can you force a soul? No, no—cowardly! But I wanted to—I wanted to kill him and force her to come back to me! And then, suddenly, I felt as if I were pressing right on the most secret nerve of my heart. I seemed to see her face, white and quivering, as if I'd stamped my heel on it. They say this world is ruled by force; it may be true—I know I have a weak spot in me. . . . I couldn't bear it. At last I jumped to my feet and shouted out, 'Turn the boat round!' Tor looked up at me as if I had gone mad. And I *had* gone mad. I seized the boat-hook and threatened him; I called him fearful

names. 'Sir,' he said, 'I don't take such names from any one!' 'You'll take them from me,' I shouted; 'turn the boat round, you idiot, you hound, you fish!' . . . I have a terrible temper, a perfect curse to me. He seemed amazed, even frightened; he sat down again suddenly and pulled the boat round. I fell on the seat, and hid my face. I believe the moon came up; there must have been a mist too, for I was cold as death. In this life, sir, we cannot hide our faces—but by degrees the pain of wounds grows less. Some will have it that such blows are mortal; it is not so. Time is merciful.

"In the early morning I went back to London. I had fever on me—and was delirious. I dare say I should have killed myself if I had not been so used to weapons—they and I were too old friends, I suppose—I can't explain. It was a long while before I was up and about. Dalton nursed me through it; his great heavy moustache had grown quite white. We never mentioned her; what was the good? There were things to settle of course, the lawyer—this was unspeakably distasteful to me. I told him it was to be as she wished, but the fellow *would* come to me, with his—there, I don't want to be unkind. I wished him to say it was my fault, but he said—I remember his smile now—he said, that was impossible, would be seen through, talked of collusion—I don't understand these things, and what's more, I can't bear them, they are—dirty.

"Two years later, when I had come back to London, after the Russo-Turkish war, I received a letter from her. I have it here." He took an old, yellow sheet of paper out of a leathern pocket-book, spread it in his fingers, and sat staring at it. For some minutes he did not speak.

"In the autumn of that same year she died in childbirth. He had deserted her. Fortunately for him, he was killed on the Indian frontier, that very year. If she had lived she would have been thirty-two next June; not a great age. . . . I know I am what they call a crank; doctors will tell you that you can't be cured of a bad illness, and be the same man again. If you are bent, to force yourself straight must leave you weak in another place. I *must* and will think well of women—everything done, and everything said against them is a stone on her dead body. Could *you* sit and listen to it?" As though driven by his own question, he rose, and paced up and down. He came back to the seat at last.

"That, sir, is the reason of my behaviour this afternoon, and again this evening. You have been so kind, I wanted—I wanted to tell you. She had a little daughter—Lucy has her now. My friend Dalton is dead; there would have been no difficulty about money, but, I am sorry to say, that he was swindled—disgracefully. It fell to me to administer his affairs—he never knew it, but he died penniless; he had trusted some wretched fellows—had an idea they would make his fortune. As I very soon found they had ruined him. It was impossible to let Lucy—such a dear woman—bear that burden. I have tried to make provision; but, you see," he took hold of my sleeve, "I, too, have not been fortunate; in fact, it's difficult to save a great deal out of £190 a year; but the capital is perfectly safe—and I get £47 10s. a quarter, paid on the nail. I have often been tempted to reinvest at a greater rate of interest, but I've never dared. Anyway, there are no debts—I've been obliged to make a rule not to buy what I couldn't pay for on the spot—

Now I am really plaguing you—but I wanted to tell you—in case—anything should happen to me.” He seemed to take a sudden scare, stiffened, twisted his moustache, and muttering, “Your great kindness ! Shall never forget !” turned hurriedly away.

He vanished ; his footsteps, and the tap of his stick grew fainter and fainter. They died out. He was gone. Suddenly I got up and hastened after him. I soon stopped—what was there to say ?

VIII

The following day I was obliged to go to Nice, and did not return till midnight. The porter told me that Jules le Ferrier had been to see me. The next morning, while I was still in bed, the door was opened, and Jules appeared. His face was very pale ; and the moment he stood still drops of perspiration began coursing down his cheeks.

“Georges !” he said, “he is dead. There, there ! How stupid you look ! My man is packing. I have half an hour before the train ; my evidence shall come from Italy. I have done my part, the rest is for you. Why did you have that dinner ! The Don Quixote ! The idiot ! The *poor* man ! Don’t move ! Have you a cigar ? Listen ! When you followed him, I followed the other two. My infernal curiosity ! Can you conceive a greater folly ? How fast they walked, those two ! feeling their cheeks, as if he had struck them both, you know ; it was funny. They soon saw me, for their eyes were all round about their heads ; they had the mark of a glove on their cheeks.” The colour began to come back into Jules’s face ; he gesticu-

lated with his cigar and became more and more dramatic. "They waited for me. '*Teins!*' said one, 'this gentleman was with him. My friend's name is M. le Baron de ——. The man who struck him was an odd-looking person; kindly inform me whether it is possible for my friend to meet him?' Eh!" commented Jules, "he was offensive! Was it for me to give our dignity away? 'Perfectly, monsieur!' I answered. 'In that case,' he said, 'please give me his name and address.' . . . I could not remember his name, and as for the address, I never knew it! . . . I reflected. 'That,' I said, 'I am unable to do, for special reasons.' 'Aha!' he said, 'reasons that will prevent our fighting him, I suppose?' 'On the contrary,' I said. 'I will convey your request to him; I may mention that I have heard he is the best swordsman and pistol-shot in Europe. Good-night!' I wished to give them something to dream of, you understand. . . . Patience, my dear! Patience! I was coming to you, but I thought I would let them sleep on it—there was plenty of time! But yesterday morning I came into the *Place*, and there he was on the bench, with a big dog. I declare to you he blushed like a young girl. 'Sir,' he said, 'I was hoping to meet you; last evening I made a great disturbance. I took an unpardonable liberty'—and he put in my hand an envelope. My friend, what do you suppose it contained—a pair of gloves! Senor Don Punctilioso, *hein?* He was the devil, this friend of yours; he fascinated me with his gentle eyes and his white moustachettes, his humility, his flames—poor man! . . . I told him I had been asked to take him a challenge. 'If anything comes of it,' I said, 'make use of me!' 'Is that so?' he said. 'I am most grateful for your kind offer. Let me see—it

is so long since I fought a duel. The sooner it's over the better. Could you arrange to-morrow morning? Weapons? Yes; let them choose.' . . . You see, my friend, there was no hanging back here; *non! voilà en train.*"

Jules took out his watch. "I have sixteen minutes. It is lucky for you that you were away yesterday, or you would be in my shoes now. I fixed the place, right hand of the road to Roquebrune, just by the railway cutting, and the time—five-thirty of the morning. It was arranged that I should call for him. Disgusting hour; I have not been up so early since I fought Jacques Tirbaut in '85. At five o'clock I found him ready and drinking tea with rum in it—singular man! he made me have some too, brrr! He was shaved, and dressed in that old frock-coat. His great dog jumped into the carriage, but he bade her get out, took her paws on his shoulders, and whispered in her ear some Italian words; a charm, *hein!* and back she went, the tail between the legs. We drove slowly, so as not to shake his arm. He was more gay than I. All the way he talked to me of you: how kind you were! how good you had been to him! 'You do not speak of yourself!' I said. 'Have you no friends, nothing to say? Sometimes an accident will happen!' 'Oh!' he answered, 'there is no danger; but if by any chance—well, there is a letter in my pocket.' 'And if you should kill *him*?' I said. 'But I shall not,' he answered slyly: 'do you think I am going to fire at him? No, no; he is too young.' 'But,' I said, 'I am not going to stand that!' 'Yes,' he replied, 'I owe him a shot; but there is no danger—not the least danger.' We had arrived; already they were there. Ah! bah! You know the preliminaries, the

politeness—this duelling, you know, it is absurd, after all. We placed them at twenty paces. It is not a bad place. There are pine-trees round, and rocks ; at that hour it was cool and grey as a church. I handed him the pistol. How can I describe him to you, standing there, smoothing the barrel with his fingers ! ‘What a beautiful thing a good pistol !’ he said. ‘Only a fool or a madman throws away his life,’ I said. ‘Certainly,’ he replied, ‘certainly ; but there is no danger,’ and he regarded me, raising his moustachette.

“There they stood then, back to back, with the mouths of their pistols to the sky. ‘*Un !*’ I cried, ‘*deux ! tirez !*’ They turned, I saw the smoke of his shot go straight up like a prayer ; his pistol dropped. I ran to him. He looked surprised, put out his hand, and fell into my arms. He was dead. Those fools came running up. ‘What is it ?’ cried one. I made him a bow. ‘As you see,’ I said ; ‘you have made a pretty shot. My friend fired in the air. Messieurs, you had better breakfast in Italy.’ We carried him to the carriage, and covered him with a rug ; the others drove for the frontier. I brought him to his room. Here is his letter.” Jules stopped ; tears were running down his face. “He is dead ; I have closed his eyes. Look here, you know, we are all of us cads—it is the rule ; but this—this, perhaps, was the exception.” And without another word he rushed away. . . .

Outside the old fellow’s lodging a dismounted *cocher* was standing disconsolate in the sun. “How was I to know they were going to fight a duel ?” he burst out on seeing me. “He had white hair—I call you to witness he had white hair. This is bad for me ; they will ravish my licence. Aha ! you will see—this is bad for me !” I gave him the slip and found my

way upstairs. The old fellow was alone, lying in the bed, his feet covered with a rug as if he might feel cold; his eyes were closed, but in this sleep of death, he still had that air of faint surprise. At full length, watching the bed intently, Freda lay, as she lay nightly when he was really asleep. The shutters were half open; the room still smelt slightly of rum. I stood for a long time looking at the face; the little white fans of moustache brushed upwards even in death, the hollows in his cheeks, the quiet of his figure; he was like some old knight. . . . The dog broke the spell. She sat up, and resting her paws on the bed, licked his face. I went downstairs—I couldn't bear to hear her howl. This was his letter to me, written in a pointed handwriting :

“MY DEAR SIR,—Should you read this I shall be gone. I am ashamed to trouble you—a man should surely manage so as not to give trouble; and yet I believe you will not consider me importunate. If, then, you will pick up the pieces of an old fellow, I ask you to have my sword, the letter enclosed in this, and the photograph that stands on the stove buried with me. My will and the acknowledgments of my property are between the leaves of the Byron in my tin chest; they should go to Lucy Tor—address thereon. Perhaps you will do me the honour to retain for yourself any of my books that may give you pleasure. In the *Pilgrim's Progress* you will find some excellent recipes for Turkish coffee, Italian and Spanish dishes, and washing wounds. The landlady's daughter speaks Italian, and she would, I know, like to have Freda; the poor dog will miss me. I have read of old Indian warriors taking their horses and dogs with them to the

happy hunting-grounds. Freda would come—noble animals are dogs! She eats once a day—a good large meal—and requires much salt. If you have animals of your own, sir, don't forget—all animals require salt. I have no debts, thank God! The money in my pockets would bury me decently—not that there is any danger. And I am ashamed to weary you with details—the least a man can do is not to make a fuss—and yet he must be found ready.—Sir, with profound gratitude, your servant,

“ROGER BRUNE.”

Everything was as he had said. The photograph on the stove was that of a young girl of nineteen or twenty, dressed in an old-fashioned style, with hair gathered backward in a knot. The eyes gazed at you with a little frown, the lips were tightly closed; the expression of the face was eager, quick, wilful, and, above all, young.

The tin trunk was scented with dry fragments of some herb, the history of which in that trunk man knoweth not. . . . There were a few clothes, but very few, all older than those he usually wore. Besides the Byron and *Pilgrim's Progress* were Scott's *Quentin Durward*, Captain Marryat's *Midshipman Easy*, a pocket Testament, and a long and frightfully stiff book on the art of fortifying towns, much thumbed, and bearing date 1863. By far the most interesting thing I found, however, was a diary, kept down to the preceding Christmas. It was a pathetic document, full of calculations of the price of meals; resolutions to be careful over this or that; doubts whether he must not give up smoking; sentences of fear that Freda had not enough to eat. It appeared that he had tried to live on ninety pounds a

year, and send the other hundred pounds home to Lucy for the child; in this struggle he was always failing, having to send less than the amount—the entries showed that this was a nightmare to him. The last words, written on Christmas Day, were these: “What is the use of writing this, since it records nothing but failure!”

The landlady’s daughter and myself were at the funeral. The same afternoon I went into the concert-room, where I had spoken to him first. When I came out Freda was lying at the entrance, looking into the faces of every one that passed, and sniffing idly at their heels. Close by the landlady’s daughter hovered, a biscuit in her hand, and a puzzled, sorry look on her face.

September, 1900.

THE JURYMAN

I

"Don't you see, brother, I was reading yesterday the Gospel about Christ, the little Father; how He suffered, how He walked on the earth. I suppose you have heard about it?"

"Indeed, I have," replied Stepannitch; "but we are people in darkness; we can't read."—TOLSTOI.

MR. HENRY BOSENGATE, of the London Stock Exchange, seated himself in his car that morning during the Great War with a sense of injury. Major in a Volunteer Corps; member of all the local committees; lending this very car to the neighbouring hospital, at times even driving it himself for their benefit; subscribing to funds, so far as his diminished income permitted—he was conscious of being an asset to the country, and one whose time could not be wasted with impunity. To be summoned to sit on a jury at the local assizes, and not even the grand jury at that! It was in the nature of an outrage.

Strong and upright, with hazel eyes and dark eyebrows, pinkish-brown cheeks, a forehead white, well-shaped, and getting high, with greyish hair glossy and well-brushed, and a trim moustache, he might have been taken for that colonel of Volunteers which indeed he was in a fair way of becoming.

His wife had followed him out under the porch, and stood bracing her supple body clothed in lilac linen.

Red rambler roses formed a sort of crown to her dark head ; her ivory-coloured face had in it just a suggestion of the Japanese.

Mr. Bosengate spoke through the whirr of the engine :

"I don't expect to be late, dear. This business is ridiculous. There oughtn't to *be* any crime in 'these days.'"

His wife—her name was Kathleen—smiled. She looked very pretty and cool, Mr. Bosengate thought. To one bound on this dull and stuffy business everything he owned seemed pleasant—the geranium beds beside the gravel drive, his long, red-brick house mellowing decorously in its creepers and ivy, the little clock-tower over stables now converted to a garage, the dovecote, masking at the other end the conservatory which adjoined the billiard-room. Close to the red-brick lodge his two children, Kate and Harry, ran out from under the acacia trees, and waved to him, scrambling bare-legged on to the low, red, ivy-covered wall which guarded his domain of eleven acres. Mr. Bosengate waved back, thinking : ' Jolly couple—by Jove, they are ! ' Above their heads, through the trees, he could see right away to some Downs, faint in the July heat haze. And he thought : ' Pretty a spot as one could have got, so close to town ! '

Despite the war he had enjoyed these last two years more than any of the ten since he built " Charmleigh " and settled down to semi-rural domesticity with his young wife. There had been a certain piquancy, a savour added to existence, by the country's peril, and all the public service and sacrifice it demanded. His chauffeur was gone, and one gardener did the work of three. He enjoyed—positively enjoyed—his com-

mittee work ; even the serious decline of business and increase of taxation had not much worried one continually conscious of the national crisis and his own part therein. The country had wanted waking up, wanted a lesson in effort and economy ; and the feeling that he had not spared himself in these strenuous times had given a zest to those quiet pleasures of bed and board which, at his age, even the most patriotic could retain with a good conscience. He had denied himself many things—new clothes, presents for Kathleen and the children, travel, and that pine-apple house which he had been on the point of building when the war broke out ; new wine, too, and cigars, and membership of the two Clubs which he had never used in the old days. The hours had seemed fuller and longer, sleep better earned—wonderful, the things one could do without when put to it ! He turned the car into the high road, driving dreamily, for he was in plenty of time. The war was going pretty well now ; he was no fool optimist, but now that conscription was in force, one might reasonably hope for its end within a year. Then there would be a boom, and one might let oneself go a little. Visions of theatres and supper with his wife at the Savoy afterwards, and cosy night drives back into the sweet-smelling country behind your own chauffeur once more teased a fancy which even now did not soar beyond the confines of domestic pleasures. He pictured his wife in new dresses by Jay—she was fifteen years younger than himself, and “paid for dressing” as they said. He had always delighted—as men older than their wives will—in the admiration she excited from others not privileged to enjoy her charms. Her rather queer and ironical beauty, her cool, irreproachable wifeliness, was a constant balm to him. They would

give dinner parties again, have their friends down from town, and he would once more enjoy sitting at the foot of the dinner table while Kathleen sat at the head, with the light soft on her ivory shoulders, behind flowers she had arranged in that original way of hers, and fruit which he had grown in his hot-houses; once more he would take legitimate interest in the wine he offered to his guests—once more stock that Chinese cabinet wherein he kept cigars. Yes—there was a certain satisfaction in these days of privation, if only from the anticipation they created.

The sprinkling of villas had become continuous on either side of the high road; and women going out to shop, tradesmen's boys delivering victuals, young men in khaki, began to abound. Now and then a limping or bandaged form would pass—some bit of human wreckage! and Mr. Bosengate would think mechanically: 'Another of those poor devils! Wonder if we've had his case before us!'

Running his car into the best hotel garage of the little town, he made his way leisurely over to the court. It stood back from the market-place, and was already lapped by a sea of persons having, as in the outer ring at race meetings, an air of business at which one must not be caught out, together with a soaked or flushed appearance. Mr. Bosengate could not resist putting his handkerchief to his nose. He had carefully drenched it with lavender water, and to this fact owed, perhaps, his immunity from the post of foreman on the jury—for, say what you will about the English, they have a deep instinct for affairs.

He found himself second in the front row of the jury box, and through the odour of "Sanitas" gazed at the judge's face expressionless up there, for all the world

like a be-wigged bust. His fellows in the box had that appearance of falling between two classes characteristic of jurymen. Mr. Bosengate was not impressed. On one side of him the foreman sat, a prominent upholsterer, known in the town as "Gentleman Fox." His dark and beautifully brushed and oiled hair and moustache, his radiant linen, gold watch and chain, the white piping to his waistcoat, and a habit of never saying "Sir" had long marked him out from commoner men; he undertook to bury people too, to save them trouble; and was altogether superior. On the other side Mr. Bosengate had one of those men who, except when they sit on juries, are never seen without a little brown bag, and the appearance of having been interrupted in a drink. Pale and shiny, with large loose eyes shifting from side to side, he had an underdone voice and uneasy, flabby hands. Mr. Bosengate disliked sitting next to him. Beyond this commercial traveller sat a dark pale young man with spectacles; beyond him again, a short old man with grey moustache, mutton chops, and innumerable wrinkles; and the front row was completed by a chemist. The three immediately behind, Mr. Bosengate did not thoroughly master; but the three at the end of the second row he learned in their order of an oldish man in a grey suit, given to winking; an inanimate person with the mouth of a moustachioed codfish, over whose long bald crown three wisps of damp hair were carefully arranged; and a dried, dapperish, clean-shorn man, whose mouth seemed terrified lest it should be surprised without a smile. Their first and second verdicts were recorded without the necessity for withdrawal, and Mr. Bosengate was already sleepy when the third case was called. The sight of khaki revived his drooping attention. But

what a weedy-looking specimen ! This prisoner had a truly nerveless, pitiable, dejected air. If he had ever had a military bearing it had shrunk into him during his confinement. His ill-shaped brown tunic, whose little brass buttons seemed trying to keep smiling, struck Mr. Bosengate as ridiculously short, used though he was to such things. ‘ Absurd,’ he thought—‘ Lum-bago ! Just where they ought to be covered ! ’ Then the officer and gentleman stirred in him, and he added to himself : ‘ Still, there must be some distinction made ! ’ The little soldier’s visage had once perhaps been tanned, but was now the colour of dark dough ; his large brown eyes with white showing below the iris, as so often in the eyes of very nervous people—wandered from face to face, of judge, counsel, jury, and public. There were hollows in his cheeks, his dark hair looked damp ; around his neck he wore a bandage. The commercial traveller on Mr. Bosengate’s left turned, and whispered : “ *Felo de se !* My hat ! what a guy ! ” Mr. Bosengate pretended not to hear—he could not bear that fellow !—and slowly wrote on a bit of paper : “ Owen Lewis.” Welsh ! Well, he looked it—not at all an English face. Attempted suicide—not at all an English crime ! Suicide implied surrender, a putting-up of hands to Fate—to say nothing of the religious aspect of the matter. And suicide in khaki seemed to Mr. Bosengate particularly abhorrent ; like turning tail in face of the enemy ; almost meriting the fate of a deserter. He looked at the prisoner, trying not to give way to this prejudice. And the prisoner seemed to look at him, though this, perhaps, was fancy.

The counsel for the prosecution, a little, alert, grey, decided man, above military age, began detailing the circumstances of the crime. Mr. Bosengate, though

not particularly sensitive to atmosphere, could perceive a sort of current running through the court. It was as if jury and public were thinking rhythmically in obedience to the same unexpressed prejudice of which he himself was conscious. Even the Cæsar-like pale face up there, presiding, seemed in its ironic serenity responding to that current.

"Gentlemen of the jury, before I call my evidence, I direct your attention to the bandage the accused is still wearing. He gave himself this wound with his Army razor, adding, if I may say so, insult to the injury he was inflicting on his country. He pleads not guilty; and before the magistrates he said that absence from his wife was preying on his mind"—the advocate's close lips widened—"Well, gentlemen, if such an excuse is to weigh with us in these days, I'm sure I don't know what's to happen to the Empire."

'No, by George!' thought Mr. Bosengate.

The evidence of the first witness, a room-mate who had caught the prisoner's hand, and of the sergeant, who had at once been summoned, was conclusive, and he began to cherish a hope that they would get through without withdrawing, and he would be home before five. But then a hitch occurred. The regimental doctor failed to respond when his name was called; and the judge having for the first time that day showed himself capable of human emotion, intimated that he would adjourn until the morrow.

Mr. Bosengate received the announcement with equanimity. He would be home even earlier! And gathering up the sheets of paper he had scribbled on, he put them in his pocket and got up. The would-be suicide was being taken out of the court—a shambling drab figure with shoulders hunched. What good were

men like that in these days! What good! The prisoner looked up. Mr. Bosengate encountered in full the gaze of those large brown eyes, with the white showing underneath. What a suffering, wretched, pitiful face! A man had no business to give you a look like that! The prisoner passed on down the stairs, and vanished. Mr. Bosengate went out and across the market-place to the garage of the hotel where he had left his car. The sun shone fiercely and he thought: 'I must do some watering in the garden.' He brought the car out, and was about to start the engine, when someone passing said: "Good evenin'. Seedy-lookin' beggar that last prisoner, ain't he? We don't want men of that stamp." It was his neighbour on the jury, the commercial traveller, in a straw hat, with a little brown bag already in his hand and the froth of an interrupted drink on his moustache. Answering curtly: "Good evening!" and thinking: 'Nor of yours, my friend!' Mr. Bosengate started the car with unnecessary clamour. But as if brought back to life by the commercial traveller's remark, the prisoner's figure seemed to speed along too, turning up at Mr. Bosengate his pitifully unhappy eyes. Want of his wife!—queer excuse that for trying to put it out of his power ever to see her again. Why! Half a loaf, even a slice, was better than no bread. Not many of that neurotic type in the Army—thank Heaven! The lugubrious figure vanished, and Mr. Bosengate pictured instead the form of his own wife bending over her "Gloire de Dijon" roses in the rosery, where she generally worked a little before tea now that they were short of gardeners. He saw her, as often he had seen her, raise herself and stand, head to one side, a gloved hand on her slender hip, gazing as it were ironically

from under drooped lids at buds which did not come out fast enough. And the word '*Caline*,' for he was something of a French scholar, shot through his mind: '*Kathleen—Caline!*' If he found her there when he got in, he would steal up on the grass—and ah! but with great care not to crease her dress or disturb her hair! 'If only she weren't quite so self-contained,' he thought. 'It's like a cat you can't get near, not really near!'

The car, returning faster than it had come down that morning, had already passed the outskirt villas, and was breasting the hill to where, among fields and the old trees, Charmleigh lay apart from commoner life. Turning into his drive, Mr. Bosengate thought with a certain surprise: 'I wonder what she *does* think of! I wonder!' He put his gloves and hat down in the outer hall and went into the lavatory, to dip his face in cool water and wash it with sweet-smelling soap—delicious revenge on the unclean atmosphere in which he had been stewing so many hours. He came out again into the hall dazed by soap and the mellowed light, and a voice from half-way up the stairs said: "Daddy! Look!" His little daughter was standing up there with one hand on the banisters. She scrambled on to them and came sliding down, her frock up to her eyes and her holland knickers to her middle. Mr. Bosengate said mildly:

"Well, that's elegant!"

"Tea's in the summer-house. Mummy's waiting. Come on!"

With her hand in his, Mr. Bosengate went on, through the drawing-room, long and cool, with sun-blinds down, through the billiard-room, high and cool, through the conservatory, green and sweet-smelling out on to

the terrace and the upper lawn. He had never felt such sheer exhilarated joy in his home surroundings, so cool, glistening and green under the July sun; and he said :
" Well, Kit, what have you all been doing ? "

" I've fed my rabbits and Harry's ; and we've been in the attic ; Harry got his leg through the skylight. "

Mr. Bosengate drew in his breath with a hiss.

" It's all right, Daddy ; we got it out again, it's only grazed the skin. And we've been making swabs—I made seventeen—Mummy made thirty-three, and then she went to the hospital. Did you put many men in prison ? "

Mr. Bosengate cleared his throat. The question seemed to him untimely.

" Only two. "

" What's it like in prison, Daddy ? "

Mr. Bosengate, who had no more knowledge than his little daughter, replied in an absent voice :

" Not very nice. "

They were passing under a young oak tree, where the path wound round to the rosery and summer-house. Something shot down and clawed Mr. Bosengate's neck. His little daughter began to hop and suffocate with laughter.

" Oh, Daddy ! Aren't you caught ! I led you on purpose ! "

Looking up, Mr. Bosengate saw his small son lying along a low branch above him—like the leopard he was declaring himself to be (for fear of error), and thought blithely : ' What an active little chap it is ! '

" Let me drop on your shoulders, Daddy—like they do on the deer. "

" Oh, yes ! Do be a deer, Daddy ! "

Mr. Bosengate did not see being a deer ; his hair

had just been brushed. But he entered the rosery buoyantly between his offspring. His wife was standing precisely as he had imagined her, in a pale blue frock open at the neck, with a narrow black band round the waist, and little accordion pleats below. She looked her coolest. Her smile, when she turned her head, hardly seemed to take Mr. Bosengate seriously enough. He placed his lips below one of her half-drooped eyelids. She even smelled of roses. His children began to dance round their mother, and Mr. Bosengate, firmly held between them, was also compelled to do this, until she said :

“ When you’ve quite done, let’s have tea ! ”

It was not the greeting he had imagined coming along in the car. Earwigs were plentiful in the summer-house—used perhaps twice a year, but indispensable to every country residence—and Mr. Bosengate was not sorry for the excuse to get out again. Though all was so pleasant, he felt oddly restless, rather suffocated ; and lighting his pipe, began to move about among the roses, blowing tobacco at the greenfly ; in war-time one was never quite idle !

And suddenly he said :

“ We’re trying a wretched Tommy at the assizes.”

His wife looked up from a rose.

“ What for ? ”

“ Attempted suicide.”

“ Why did he ? ”

“ Can’t stand the separation from his wife.”

She looked at him, gave a low laugh, and said :

“ Oh dear ! ”

Mr. Bosengate was puzzled. Why did she laugh ? He looked round, saw that the children were gone, took his pipe from his mouth, and approached her.

"You look very pretty," he said. "Give me a kiss!"

His wife bent her body forward from the waist, and pushed her lips out till they touched his moustache. Mr. Bosengate felt a sensation as if he had arisen from breakfast without having eaten marmalade. He mastered it and said:

"That jury are a rum lot."

His wife's eyelids flickered. "I wish women sat on juries."

"Why?"

"It would be an experience."

Not the first time she had used that curious expression! Yet her life was far from dull, so far as he could see; with the new interests created by the war, and the constant calls on her time made by the perfection of their home life, she had a useful and busy existence. Again the random thought passed through him: 'But she never tells me anything!' And suddenly that lugubrious khaki-clad figure started up among the rose bushes. "We've got a lot to be thankful for!" he said abruptly. "I must go to work!" His wife, raising one eyebrow, smiled. "And I to weep!" Mr. Bosengate laughed—she had a pretty wit! And stroking his comely moustache where it had been kissed, he moved out into the sunshine. All the evening, throughout his labours, not inconsiderable, for this jury business had put him behind time, he was afflicted by that restless pleasure in his surroundings; would break off in mowing the lower lawn to look at the house through the trees; would leave his study and committee papers to cross into the drawing-room and sniff its dainty fragrance; paid a special good-night visit to the children having supper in the schoolroom;

pottered in and out from his dressing-room to admire his wife while she was changing for dinner ; dined with his mind perpetually on the next course ; talked volubly of the war ; and in the billiard-room afterwards, smoking the pipe which had taken the place of his cigar, could not keep still, but roamed about, now in conservatory, now in the drawing-room, where his wife and the governess were still making swabs. It seemed to him that he could not have enough of anything. About eleven o'clock he strolled out—beautiful night, only just dark enough—under the new arrangement with Time—and went down to the little round fountain below the terrace. His wife was playing the piano. Mr. Bosengate looked at the water and the flat dark water-lily leaves which floated there ; looked up at the house, where only narrow chinks of light showed, because of the Lighting Order. The dreamy music drifted out ; there was a scent of heliotrope. He moved a few steps back, and sat in the children's swing under an old lime tree. Jolly—blissful—in the warm, bloomy dark ! Of all hours of the day, this before going to bed was perhaps the pleasantest. He saw the light go up in his wife's bedroom, unscreened for a full minute, and thought : ' Aha ! If I did my duty as a special, I should "strafe" her for that.' She came to the window, her figure lighted, hands up to the back of her head, so that her bare arms gleamed. Mr. Bosengate wafted her a kiss, knowing he could not be seen. ' Lucky chap ! ' he mused ; ' she's a great joy ! ' Up went her arm, down came the blind—the house was dark again. He drew a long breath. ' Another ten minutes,' he thought, ' then I'll go in and shut up. By Jove ! The limes are beginning to smell already ! ' And, the better to take in that acme

of his well-being, he tilted the swing, lifted his feet from the ground, and swung himself toward the scented blossoms. He wanted to whelm his senses in their perfume, and closed his eyes. But instead of the domestic vision he expected, the face of the little Welsh soldier, hare-eyed, shadowy, pinched and dark and pitiful, started up with such disturbing vividness that he opened his eyes again at once. Curse! The fellow almost haunted one! Where would he be now—poor little devil! lying in his cell, thinking—thinking of his wife! Feeling suddenly morbid, Mr. Bosengate arrested the swing and stood up. Absurd!—all his well-being and mood of warm anticipation had deserted him! ‘A d——d world!’ he thought. ‘Such a lot of misery! Why should I have to sit in judgment on that poor beggar, and condemn him?’ He moved up on to the terrace and walked briskly, to rid himself of this disturbance before going in. ‘That commercial traveller chap,’ he thought, ‘the rest of those fellows—they see nothing!’ And, abruptly turning up the three stone steps, he entered the conservatory, locked it, passed into the billiard-room, and drank his barley water. One of the pictures was hanging crooked; he went up to put it straight. Still life. Grapes and apples, and lobsters! They struck him as odd for the first time. Why lobsters? The whole picture seemed dead and oily. He turned off the light, and went upstairs, passed his wife’s door, into his own room, and undressed. Clothed in his pyjamas he opened the door between the rooms. By the light coming from his own he could see her dark head on the pillow. Was she asleep? No—not asleep, certainly. The moment of fruition had come; the crowning of his pride and pleasure in his home. But he continued

to stand there. He had suddenly no pride, no pleasure, no desire ; nothing but a sort of dull resentment against everything. He turned back, shut the door, and slipping between the heavy curtains and his open window, stood looking out at the night. ' Full of misery ! ' he thought. ' Full of d——d misery ! '

II

Filing into the jury box next morning, Mr. Bosengate collided slightly with a short jurymen, whose square figure and square head of stiff yellow-red hair he had only vaguely noticed the day before. The man looked angry, and Mr. Bosengate thought : ' An ill-bred dog that ! '

He sat down quickly, and, to avoid further recognition of his fellows, gazed in front of him. His appearance on Saturdays was always military, by reason of the route march of his Volunteer Corps in the afternoon. Gentleman Fox, who belonged to the corps too, was also looking square ; but that commercial traveller on his other side seemed more *louche*, and as if surprised in immorality, than ever ; only the proximity of Gentleman Fox on the other side kept Mr. Bosengate from shrinking. Then he saw the prisoner being brought in, shadowy and dark behind the brightness of his buttons, and he experienced a sort of shock, this figure was so exactly that which had several times started up in his mind. Somehow he had expected a fresh sight of the fellow to dispel and disprove what had been haunting him, had expected to find him just an outside phenomenon, not, as it were, a part of his own life. And he gazed at the carven immobility of the judge's

face, trying to steady himself, as a drunken man will, by looking at a light. The regimental doctor, unabashed by the judge's comment on his absence the day before, gave his evidence like a man who had better things to do, and the case for the prosecution was forthwith rounded in by a little speech from counsel. The matter—he said—was clear as daylight. Those who wore His Majesty's uniform, charged with the responsibility and privilege of defending their country, were no more entitled to desert their regiments by taking their own lives than they were entitled to desert in any other way. He asked for a conviction. Mr. Bosengate felt a sympathetic shuffle passing through all feet; the judge was speaking:

"Prisoner, you can either go into the witness box and make your statement on oath, in which you may be cross-examined on it; or you can make your statement there from the dock, in which case you will not be cross-examined. Which do you elect to do?"

"From here, my lord."

Seeing him now full face, and, as it might be, come to life in the effort to convey his feelings, Mr. Bosengate had suddenly a quite different impression of the fellow. It was as if his khaki had fallen off, and he had stepped out of his own shadow, a live and quivering creature. His pinched clean-shaven face seemed to have an irregular, wilder, hairier look, his large nervous brown eyes darkened and glowed; he jerked his shoulders, his arms, his whole body, like a man suddenly freed from cramp or a suit of armour. He spoke, too, in a quick, crisp, rather high voice, pinching his consonants a little, sharpening his vowels, like a true Welshman.

"My lord and misters the jury," he said: "I was

a hairdresser when the call came on me to join the army. I had a little home and a wife. I never thought what it would be like to be away from them, I surely never did ; and I'm ashamed to be speaking it out like this—how it can squeeze and squeeze a man, how it can prey on your mind when you're nervous like I am. 'Tis not everyone that cares for his home—there's lots o' them never wants to see their wives again. But for me 'tis like being shut up in a cage, it is ! ” Mr. Bosengate saw daylight between the skinny fingers of the man's hand thrown out with a jerk. “ I cannot bear it shut up away from wife and home like what you are in the army. So when I took my razor that morning I was wild—an' I wouldn't be here now but for that man catching my hand. There was no reason in it, I'm willing to confess. It was foolish ; but wait till you get feeling like what I was, and see how it draws you. Mist'ers the jury, don't send me back to prison ; it is worse still there. If you have wives you will know what it is like for lots of us ; only some is more nervous than others. I swear to you, sirs, I could not help it——” Again the little man flung out his hand, his whole thin body shook and Mr. Bosengate felt the same sensation as when he drove his car over a dog—“ Mist'ers the jury, I hope you may never in your lives feel as I've been feeling.”

The little man ceased, his eyes shrank back into their sockets, his figure back into its mask of shadowy brown and gleaming buttons, and Mr. Bosengate was conscious that the judge was making a series of remarks ; and, very soon, of being seated at a mahogany table in the jury's with-drawing room, hearing the voice of the man with hair like an Irish terrier's saying : “ Didn't he talk through his hat, that little blighter ! ” Con-

scious, too, of the commercial traveller, still on his left—always on his left!—mopping his brow, and muttering: “Phew! It’s hot in there to-day!” while an effluvium, as of an inside accustomed to whisky, came from him. Then the man with the underlip and the three plastered wisps of hair said:

“Don’t know why we withdrew, Mr. Foreman!”

Mr. Bosengate looked round to where, at the head of the table, Gentleman Fox sat, in defensive gentility and the little white piping to his waistcoat. “I shall be happy to take the sense of the jury,” he was saying blandly.

There was a short silence, then the chemist murmured:

“I should say he must have what they call claustrophobia.”

“Clauster fiddlesticks! The feller’s a shirker, that’s all. Misses his wife—pretty excuse! Indecent, I call it!”

The speaker was the little wire-haired man; and emotion, deep and angry, stirred in Mr. Bosengate. That ill-bred little cur! He gripped the edge of the table with both hands.

“I think it’s d——d natural!” he muttered. But almost before the words had left his lips he felt dismay. What had he said—he, nearly a colonel of volunteers—endorsing such a want of patriotism! And hearing the commercial traveller murmuring: “’Ear, ’ear!” he reddened violently.

The wire-headed man said roughly:

“There’s too many of these blighted shirkers, and too much pampering of them.”

The turmoil in Mr. Bosengate increased; he remarked in an icy voice:

"I agree to no verdict that'll send the man back to prison."

At this a real tremor seemed to go round the table, as if they all saw themselves sitting there through lunch time. Then the large grey-haired man given to winking, said :

"Oh! Come, sir—after what the judge said! Come, sir! What do you say, Mr. Foreman?"

Gentleman Fox—as who should say 'This is excellent value, but I don't wish to press it on you!'—answered :

"We are only concerned with the facts. Did he or did he not try to shorten his life?"

"Of course he did—said so himself," Mr. Bosengate heard the wire-haired man snap out, and from the following murmur of assent he alone abstained. Guilty! Well—yes! There was no way out of admitting that, but his feelings revolted against handing "that poor little beggar" over to the tender mercy of his country's law. His whole soul rose in arms against agreeing with that ill-bred little cur, and the rest of this job-lot. He had an impulse to get up and walk out, saying: "Settle it your own way. Good-morning."

"It seems, sir," Gentleman Fox was saying, "that we're all agreed to guilty, except yourself. If you will allow me, I don't see how you can go behind what the prisoner himself admitted."

Thus brought up to the very guns, Mr. Bosengate, red in the face, thrust his hands deep into the side pockets of his tunic, and, staring straight before him, said :

"Very well; on condition we recommend him to mercy."

"What do you say, gentlemen; shall we recommend him to mercy?"

"'Ear 'ear!" burst from the commercial traveller, and from the chemist came the murmur:

"No harm in that."

"Well, I think there is. They shoot deserters at the front, and we let this fellow off. I'd hang the cur."

Mr. Bosengate stared at that little wire-haired brute. "Haven't you *any* feeling for others?" he wanted to say. "Can't you see that this poor devil suffers tortures?" But the sheer impossibility of doing this before ten other men brought a slight sweat out on his face and hands; and in agitation he smote the table a blow with his fist. The effect was instantaneous. Everybody looked at the wire-haired man, as if saying: "Yes, you've gone a bit too far there!" The "little brute" stood it for a moment, then muttered surlily:

"Well, commend 'im to mercy if you like; I don't care."

"That's right; they never pay any attention to it," said the grey-haired man, winking heartily. And Mr. Bosengate filed back with the others into court.

But when from the jury box his eyes fell once more on the hare-eyed figure in the dock, he had his worst moment yet. Why should this poor wretch suffer so—for no fault, no fault; while he, and these others, and that snapping counsel, and the Cæsar-like judge up there, went off to their women and their homes, blithe as bees, and probably never thought of him again? And suddenly he was conscious of the judge's voice:

"You will go back to your regiment, and endeavour to serve your country with better spirit. You may thank the jury that you are not sent to prison, and your good fortune that you were not at the front when you tried to commit this cowardly act. You are lucky to be alive."

A policeman pulled the little soldier by the arm ; his drab figure, with eyes fixed and lustreless, passed down and away. From his very soul Mr. Bosengate wanted to lean out and say : " Cheer up, cheer up ! I understand."

It was nearly ten o'clock that evening before he reached home, motoring back from the route march. His physical tiredness was abated, for he had partaken of a snack and a whisky and soda at the hotel ; but mentally he was in a curious mood. His body felt appeased, his spirit hungry. To-night he had a yearning, not for his wife's kisses, but for her understanding. He wanted to go to her and say : " I've learnt a lot to-day—found out things I never thought of. Life's a wonderful thing, Kate, a thing one can't live all to oneself ; a thing one shares with everybody, so that when another suffers, one suffers too. It's come to me that what one *has* doesn't matter a bit—it's what one does, and how one sympathises with other people. It came to me in the most extraordinary vivid way, when I was on that jury, watching that poor little rat of a soldier in his trap ; it's the first time I've ever felt—the—the spirit of Christ, you know. It's a wonderful thing, Kate—wonderful ! We haven't been close—really close, you and I, so that we each understand what the other is feeling. It's all in that, you know ; understanding—sympathy—it's priceless. When I saw that poor little devil taken down and sent back to his regiment to begin his sorrows all over again—wanting his wife, thinking and thinking of her just as you know I would be thinking and wanting you, I felt what an awful outside sort of life we lead, never telling each other what we really think and feel, never being really close. I daresay that little chap and his wife keep

nothing from each other—live each other's lives. That's what ~~we~~ ought to do. Let's get to feeling that what really matters is—understanding and loving, and not only just saying it as we all do, those fellows on the jury, and even that poor devil of a judge—what an awful life, judging one's fellow-creatures! When I left that poor little Tommy this morning, and ever since, I've longed to get back here quietly to you and tell you about it, and make a beginning. There's something wonderful in this, and I want you to feel it as I do, because you mean such a lot to me."

This was what he wanted to say to his wife, not touching, or kissing her, just looking into her eyes, watching them soften and glow as they surely must catching the infection of his new ardour. And he felt unsteady, fearfully unsteady with the desire to say it all as it should be said: swiftly, quietly, with the truth and fervour of his feeling.

The hall was not lit up, for daylight still lingered under the new arrangement. He went towards the drawing-room, but from the very door shied off to his study and stood irresolute under the picture of a "Man catching a flea" (Dutch school), which had come down to him from his father. The governess would be in there with his wife! He must wait. Essential to go straight to Kathleen and pour it all out, or he would never do it. He felt as nervous as an undergraduate going up for his *viva voce*. This thing was so big, so astoundingly and unexpectedly important. He was suddenly afraid of his wife, afraid of her coolness and her grace, and that something Japanese about her—of all those attributes he had been accustomed to admire most; afraid, as it were, of her attraction. He felt young to-night, almost boyish; would she see that he

was not really fifteen years older than herself, and she not really a part of his collection, of all the admirable appointments of his home; but a companion spirit to one who wanted a companion badly? In this agitation of his soul he could keep still no more than he could last night in the agitation of his senses; and he wandered into the dining-room. A dainty supper was set out there, sandwiches, and cake, whisky and cigarettes—even an early peach. Mr. Bosengate looked at this peach with sorrow rather than disgust. The perfection of it was of a piece with all that had gone before this new and sudden feeling. Its delicious bloom seemed to heighten his perception of the hedge around him, that hedge of the things he so enjoyed, carefully planted and tended these many years. He passed it by uneaten, and went to the window. Out there all was darkening, the fountain, the lime tree, the flower-beds, and the fields below, with the Jersey cows who would come to your call; darkening slowly, losing form, blurring into soft blackness, vanishing, but there none the less—all there—the hedge of his possessions. He heard the door of the drawing-room open, the voices of his wife and the governess in the hall, going up to bed. If only they didn't look in here! If only——! The voices ceased. He was safe now—had but to follow in a few minutes, to make sure of Kathleen alone. He turned round and stared down the length of the dark dining-room, over the rosewood table, to where in the mirror above the sideboard at the far end, his figure bathed, a stain, a mere blurred shadow; he made his way down to it along the table edge, and stood before himself as close as he could get. His throat and the roof of his mouth felt dry with nervousness; he put out his finger and touched his

face in the glass. 'You're an ass!' he thought. 'Pull yourself together, and get it over. She will see; of course she will!' He swallowed, smoothed his moustache, and walked out. Going up the stairs, his heart beat painfully; but he was in for it now, and marched straight into her room.

Dressed only in a loose blue wrapper, she was brushing her dark hair before the glass. Mr. Bosengate went up to her and stood there silent, looking down. The words he had thought of were like a swarm of bees buzzing in his head yet not one would fly from between his lips. His wife went on brushing her hair under the light which shone on her polished elbows. She looked up at him from beneath one lifted eyebrow.

"Well, dear—tired?"

With a sort of vehemence the single word "No" passed out. A faint, a quizzical smile flitted over her face; she shrugged her shoulders ever so gently. That gesture—he had seen it before! And in desperate desire to make her understand, he put his hand on her lifted arm.

"Kathleen, stop—listen to me!" His fingers tightened in his agitation and eagerness to make his great discovery known. But before he could get out a word he became conscious of that cool round arm, conscious of her eyes half-closed, sliding round at him, of her half-smiling lips, of her neck under the wrapper. And he stammered:

"I want—I must—Kathleen, I——"

She lifted her shoulders again in that little shrug.

"Yes—I know; all right!"

A wave of heat and shame, and of God knows what came over Mr. Bosengate; he fell on his knees and pressed his forehead to her arm; and he was silent, more

silent than the grave. Nothing—nothing came from him but two long sighs. Suddenly he felt her hand stroke his cheek—compassionately, it seemed to him. She made a little movement towards him; her lips met his, and he remembered nothing but that. . . .

In his own room Mr. Bosengate sat at his wide-open window, smoking a cigarette; there was no light. Moths went past, the moon was creeping up. He sat very calm, puffing the smoke out into the night air. Curious thing—life! Curious world! Curious forces in it—making one do the opposite of what one wished; always—always making one do the opposite, it seemed! The furtive light from that creeping moon was getting hold of things down there, stealing in among the boughs of the trees. ‘There’s something ironical,’ he thought, ‘which walks about. Things don’t come off as you think they will. I meant, I tried—but one doesn’t change like that all of a sudden, it seems. Fact is, life’s too big a thing for one! All the same, I’m not the man I was yesterday—not quite! He closed his eyes, and in one of those flashes of vision which come when the senses are at rest, he saw himself as it were far down below—down on the floor of a street narrow as a grave, high as a mountain, a deep dark slit of a street—walking down there, a black midget of a fellow, among other black midgets—his wife, and the little soldier, the judge and those jury chaps—*fantoques* straight up on their tiny feet, wandering down there in that dark, infinitely tall, and narrow street. “Too much for one!” he thought. “Too high for one—no getting on top of it. We’ve got to be kind, and help one another, and not expect too much, and not think too much. That’s—all!” And, squeezing out his cigarette, he took six deep breaths of the night air, and got into bed.

TIMBER

SIR ARTHUR HIRRIES, Baronet, of Hirrichugh, in a northern county, came to the decision to sell his timber in that state of mind—common during the War—which may be called patrio-profiteering. Like newspaper proprietors, writers on strategy, shipbuilders, owners of works, makers of arms and the rest of the working classes at large, his mood was : “ Let me serve my country, and if thereby my profits are increased, let me put up with it, and invest in National Bonds.”

With an encumbered estate and some of the best coverts in that northern county, it had not become practical politics to sell his timber till the Government wanted it at all costs. To let his shooting had been more profitable, till now, when a patriotic action and a stroke of business had become synonymous. A man of sixty-five, but not yet grey, with a reddish tinge in his moustache, cheeks, lips, and eyelids, slightly knock-kneed, and with large, rather spreading feet, he moved in the best circles in a somewhat embarrassed manner. At the enhanced price, the timber at Hirrichugh would enfranchise him for the remainder of his days.’ He sold it therefore one day of April when the War news was bad to a Government official on the spot. He sold it at half-past five in the afternoon, practically for cash down, and drank a stiff whisky and soda to wash away the taste of the transaction ; for, though no sentimentalist, his great-great-grandfather had planted most of it, and his grandfather the rest. Royalty too had shot

there in its time ; and he himself (never much of a sportsman) had missed more birds in the rides and hollows of his fine coverts than he cared to remember. But the country was in need, and the price considerable. Bidding the Government official good-bye, he lighted a cigar, and went across the Park to take a farewell stroll among his timber.

He entered the home covert by a path leading through a group of pear trees just coming into bloom. Smoking cigars and drinking whisky in the afternoon in preference to tea, Sir Arthur Hirries had not much sense of natural beauty. But those pear trees impressed him, greenish white against blue sky and fleecy thick clouds which looked as if they had snow in them. They were deuced pretty, and promised a good year for fruit, if they escaped the late frosts, though it certainly looked like freezing to-night ! He paused a moment at the wicket gate to glance back at them—like scantily-clothed maidens posing on the outskirts of his timber. Such, however, was not the vision of Sir Arthur Hirries, who was considering how he should invest the balance of the cash down after paying off his mortgages. National Bonds—the country was in need !

Passing through the gate he entered the ride of the home covert. Variety lay like colour on his woods. They stretched for miles, and his ancestors had planted almost every kind of tree—beech, oak, birch, sycamore, ash, elm, hazel, holly, pine ; a lime tree and a hornbeam here and there, and further in among the winding coverts, spinneys and belts of larch. The evening air was sharp, and sleet showers came whirling from those bright clouds ; he walked briskly, drawing at his richly fragrant cigar, the whisky still warm within him. He walked thinking, with a gentle melancholy slowly

turning a little sulky, that he would never again be pointing out with his shooting stick to such or such a guest where he was to stand to get the best birds over him. The pheasants had been let down during the War, but he put up two or three old cocks who went clattering and whirring out to left and right; and rabbits crossed the rides quietly to and fro, within easy shot. He came to where Royalty had stood fifteen years ago during the last drive. He remembered Royalty saying: "Very pretty shooting at that last stand, Hirries; birds just about as high as I like them." The ground indeed rose rather steeply there, and the timber was oak and ash, with a few dark pines sprinkled into the bare greyish twiggery of the oaks, always costive in spring, and the just greening feather of the ashes.

"They'll be cutting those pines first," he thought—strapping trees, straight as the lines of Euclid, and free of branches, save at their tops. In the brisk wind those tops swayed a little and gave forth soft complaint. "Three times my age," he thought; "prime timber." The ride wound sharply and entered a belt of larch, whose steep rise entirely barred off the rather sinister sunset—a dark and wistful wood, delicate dun and grey, whose green shoots and crimson tips would have perfumed the evening coolness, but for the cigar smoke in his nostrils. "They'll have this spinney for pit props," he thought; and, taking a cross ride through it, he emerged in a heathery glen of birch trees. No forester, he wondered if they would make anything of those whitened, glistening shapes. His cigar had gone out now, and he leaned against one of the satin-smooth stems, under the lacery of twig and bud, sheltering the flame of a relighting match. A hare lopped away among the bilberry shoots; a jay, painted like a fan,

squawked and fluttered past him up the glen. Interested in birds, and wanting just one more jay to complete a fine stuffed group of them, Sir Arthur, though devoid of a gun, followed to see where "the beggar's" nest was. The glen dipped rapidly, and the character of the timber changed, assuming a greater girth and solidity. There was a lot of beech here, a bit he did not know, for though taken in by the beaters, no guns could be stationed there because of the lack of undergrowth. The jay had vanished, and light had begun to fail. "I must get back," he thought, "or I shall be late for dinner." He debated for a moment whether to retrace his steps or to cut across the beeches and regain the home covert by a loop. The jay, reappearing to the left, deciding him to cross the beech grove. He did so, and took a narrow ride up through a dark bit of mixed timber with heavy undergrowth. The ride, after favouring the left for a little, bent away to the right; Sir Arthur followed it hurriedly, conscious that twilight was gathering fast. It must bend again to the left in a minute! It did, and then to the right, and, the undergrowth remaining thick, he could only follow on, or else retrace his steps. He followed on, beginning to get hot in spite of a sleet shower falling through the dusk. He was not framed by Nature for swift travelling—his knees turning in and his toes turning out—but he went at a good bat, uncomfortably aware that the ride was still taking him away from home, and expecting it at any minute to turn left again. It did not, and hot, out of breath, a little bewildered, he stood still in three-quarter darkness, to listen. Not a sound save that of wind on the tops of the trees, and a faint creaking of timber, where two stems had grown athwart and were touching.

The path was a regular will-o'-the-wisp. He must make a bee line of it through the undergrowth into another ride! He had never before been amongst his timber in the dusk, and he found the shapes of the confounded trees more weird, and as if menacing, than he had ever dreamed of. He stumbled quickly on in and out of them among the undergrowth, without coming to a ride.

"Here I am stuck in this damned wood!" he thought. To call these formidably encircling shapes "a wood" gave him relief. After all, it was *his* wood, and nothing very untoward could happen to a man in his own wood, however dark it might get; he could not be more than a mile and a half at the outside from his dining-room! He looked at his watch, whose hands he could just see—nearly half-past seven! The sleet had become snow, but it hardly fell on him, so thick was the timber just here. But he had no overcoat and suddenly he felt that first sickening little drop in his chest, which presages alarm. Nobody knew he was in this damned wood! And in a quarter of an hour it would be as black as your hat! He *must* get on and out! The trees amongst which he was stumbling produced quite a sick feeling now in one who hitherto had never taken trees seriously. What monstrous growths they were! The thought that seeds, tiny seeds or saplings, planted by his ancestors, could attain such huge impending and imprisoning bulk—ghostly great growths mounting up to heaven and shutting off this world—exasperated and unnerved him. He began to run, caught his foot in a root and fell flat on his face. The cursed trees seemed to have a down on him! Rubbing elbows and forehead with his snow-wetted hands, he leaned against a trunk to get his breath, and summon the sense of

direction to his brain. Once as a young man he had been "bushed" at night in Vancouver Island; quite a scary business! But he had come out all right, though his camp had been the only civilised spot within a radius of twenty miles. And here he was, on his own estate, within a mile or two of home, getting into a funk. It was childish! And he laughed. The wind answered, sighing and threshing in the tree tops. There must be a regular blizzard blowing now, and, to judge by the cold, from the north—but whether north-east or north-west was the question. Besides, how keep definite direction without a compass, in the dark? The timber, too, with its thick trunks, diverted the wind into keen, directionless draughts. He looked up, but could make nothing of the two or three stars that he could see. It was a mess! And he lighted a second cigar with some difficulty, for he had begun to shiver. The wind in this blasted wood cut through his Norfolk jacket and crawled about his body, which had become hot from his exertions, and now felt clammy and half-frozen. This would mean pneumonia, if he didn't look out! And, half feeling his way from trunk to trunk, he started on again, but for all he could tell he might be going round in a circle, might even be crossing rides without realising, and again that sickening drop occurred in his chest. He stood still and shouted. He had the feeling of shouting into walls of timber, dark and heavy, which threw the sound back at him.

'Curse you!' he thought; 'I wish I'd sold you six months ago!' The wind fleered and mowed in the tree tops; and he started off again at a run in that dark wilderness; till, hitting his head against a low branch, he fell stunned. He lay several minutes unconscious,

came to himself deadly cold, and struggled on to his feet.

"By Jove!" he thought, with a sort of stammer in his brain; "this is a bad business! I may be out here all night!" For an unimaginative man, it was extraordinary what vivid images he had just then. He saw the face of the Government official who had bought his timber, and the slight grimace with which he had agreed to the price. He saw his butler, after the gong had gone, standing like a stuck pig by the sideboard, waiting for him to come down. What would they do when he didn't come? Would they have the *nous* to imagine that he might have lost his way in the coverts, and take lanterns and search for him? Far more likely they would think he had walked over to "Greenlands" or "Berrymoor," and stayed there to dinner. And, suddenly, he saw himself slowly freezing out here, in the snowy night, among this cursed timber. With a vigorous shake, he butted again into the darkness among the tree trunks. He was angry now with himself, with the night, with the trees; so angry that he actually let out with his fist at a trunk against which he had stumbled, and scored his knuckles. It was humiliating; and Sir Arthur Hirries was not accustomed to humiliation. In anybody else's wood—yes; but to be lost like this in one's own coverts! Well, if he had to walk all night, he would get out! And he plunged on doggedly in the darkness.

He was fighting with his timber now, as if the thing were alive and each tree an enemy. In the interminable stumbling exertion of that groping progress his angry mood gave place to half-comatose philosophy. Trees! His great-great-grandfather had planted them! His own was the fifth man's life, but the trees were almost

as young as ever ; they made nothing of a man's life ! He sniggered : And a man made nothing of theirs ! Did they know they were going to be cut down ? All the better if they did, and were sweating in their shoes. He pinched himself—his thoughts were becoming so queer ! He remembered that once, when his liver was out of order, trees had seemed to him like solid, tall diseases—bulbous, scarred, cavernous, witch-armed, fungoid emanations of the earth. Well, so they were ! And he was among them, on a snowy pitch-black night, engaged in this death-struggle ! The occurrence of the word death in his thoughts brought him up all standing. Why couldn't he concentrate his mind on getting out ; why was he mooning about the life and nature of trees instead of trying to remember the conformation of his coverts, so as to re-ignite in himself some sense of general direction ? He struck a number of matches to get a sight of his watch again. Great heaven ! He had been walking nearly two hours since he last looked at it ; and in what direction ? They said a man in a fog went round and round because of some kink in his brain ! He began now to feel the trees, searching for a hollow trunk. A hollow would be some protection from the cold—his first conscious confession of exhaustion. He was not in training, and he was sixty-five. The thought : "I can't keep this up much longer," caused a second explosion of sullen anger. Damnation ! Here he was—for all he could tell—standing where he had sat perhaps a dozen times on his spread shooting stick ; watching sunlight on bare twigs, or the nose of his spaniel twitching beside him, listening to the tap of the beaters' sticks, and the shrill, drawn-out : "Marrk ! Cock over !" Would they let the dogs out, to pick up his tracks ? No ! ten to

one they would assume he was staying the night at the Summertons,' or at Lady Mary's, as he had done before now, after dining there. And suddenly his strained heart leaped. He had struck a ride again! His mind slipped back into place like an elastic let-go, relaxed, quivering gratefully. He had only to follow this ride, and somewhere, somehow he would come out. And be hanged if he would let them know what a fool he had made of himself! Right or left—which way. He turned so that the flying snow came in his back, hurrying forward between the denser darkness on either hand, where the timber stood in walls, moving his arms across and across his body, as if dragging a concertina to full stretch, to make sure that he was keeping in the path. He went what seemed an interminable way like this, till he was brought up all standing by trees, and could find no outlet, no continuation. Turning in his tracks, with the snow in his face now he retraced his steps till once more he was brought up short by trees. He stood panting. It was ghastly—ghastly! And in a panic he dived this way and that to find the bend, the turning, the way on. The sleet stung his eyes, the wind fleered and whistled, the boughs sloughed and moaned. He struck matches, trying to shade them with his cold, wet hands, but one by one they went out, and still he found no turning. The ride must have a blind alley at either end, the turning be down the side somewhere! Hope revived in him. Never say die! He began a second retracing of his steps, feeling the trunks along one side to find a gap. His breath came with difficulty. What would old Brodley say if he could see him, soaked, frozen, tired to death, stumbling along in the darkness among this cursed timber—old Brodley who had told him his heart was

in poor case! . . . A gap? Ah! No trunks—a ride at last! He turned, felt a sharp pain in his knee and pitched forward. He could not rise—the knee dislocated six years ago was out again. Sir Arthur Hirries clenched his teeth. Nothing more could happen to him! But after a minute—blank and bitter—he began to crawl along the new ride. Oddly he felt less discouraged and alarmed on hands and knee—for he could use but one. It was a relief to have his eyes fixed on the ground, not peering at the tree trunks; or perhaps there was less strain for the moment on his heart. He crawled, stopping every minute or so to renew his strength. He crawled mechanically, waiting for his heart, his knee, his lungs to stop him. The earth was snowed over, and he could feel its cold wetness as he scraped along. Good tracks to follow, if anybody struck them! But in this dark forest——! In one of his halts, drying his hands as best he could, he struck a match, and sheltering it desperately, fumbled out his watch. Past ten o'clock! He wound the watch, and put it back against his heart. If only he could wind his heart! And squatting there he counted his matches—four! “Well,” he thought grimly, “I won’t light them to show me my blasted trees. I’ve got a cigar left; I’ll keep them for that.” And he crawled on again. He must keep going while he could!

He crawled till his heart and lungs and knee struck work; and leaning his back against a tree, sat huddled together, so exhausted that he felt nothing save a sort of bitter heartache. He even dropped asleep, waking with a shudder, dragged from a dream armchair at his Club into this cold, wet darkness and the blizzard moaning in the trees. He tried to crawl again, but could not, and for some minutes stayed motionless,

hugging his body with his arms. "Well," he thought vaguely, "I *have* done it!" His mind was in such lethargy that he could not even pity himself. His matches: could he make a fire? But he was no woodsman, and, though he groped around, could find no fuel that was not soaking wet. He scraped a hole and with what papers he had in his pockets tried to kindle the wet wood. No good! He had only two matches left now, and he remembered his cigar. He took it out, bit the end off, and began with infinite precautions to prepare for lighting it. The first burned, and the cigar drew. He had one match left, in case he dozed and let the thing go out. Looking up through the blackness he could see a star. He fixed his eyes on it, and leaning against the trunk, drew the smoke down into his lungs. With his arms crossed tightly on his breast he smoked very slowly. When it was finished—what? Cold, and the wind in the trees until the morning! Halfway through the cigar, he dozed off, slept a long time, and woke up so cold that he could barely summon vitality enough to strike his last match. By some miracle it burned, and he got his cigar to draw again. This time he smoked it nearly to its end, without mentality, almost without feeling, except the physical sense of bitter cold. Once with a sudden clearing of the brain, he thought faintly: "Thank God, I sold the — trees, and they'll all come down!" The thought drifted away in frozen incoherence, drifted out like his cigar smoke into the sleet; and with a faint grin on his lips he dozed off again. . . .

An under-keeper found him at ten o'clock next morning, blue from cold, under a tall elm tree, within a mile of his bed, one leg stretched out, the other hunched up toward his chest, with its foot dug into the under-

growth for warmth, his head huddled into the collar of his coat, his arms crossed on his breast. They said he must have been dead at least five hours. Along one side snow had drifted against him ; but the trunk had saved his back and other side. Above him, the spindly top boughs of that tall tree were covered with green-gold clusters of tiny crinkled elm flowers, against a deep blue sky—gay as a song of perfect praise. The wind had dropped, and after the cold of the night the birds were singing their clearest in the sunshine.

They did not cut down the elm tree under which they found his body, with the rest of the sold timber, but put a little iron fence round it, and a little tablet on its trunk.

1920.

SANTA LUCIA

RETURNING from the English Church at Monte Carlo towards his hotel, old Trevillian paused at a bend in the road to rest his thin calves. Through a mimosa tree the sea was visible, very blue, and Trevillian's eye rested on it with the filmy brown stare of old age.

Monte Carlo was changed, but that blue, tideless, impassive sea was the same as on his first visit forty-five years ago, and this was pleasant to one conservative by nature. Since then he had married; made money, and inherited more; "raised," as Americans called it, a family—all, except his daughter Agatha, out in the world; had been widowed, and developed old man's cough. He and Agatha now left The Cedars, their country house in Hertfordshire, for the Riviera with the annual regularity of swallows. Usually they stayed at Nice or Cannes; but this year, because a friend of Agatha's was the wife of the English chaplain, they had chosen Monte Carlo.

It was near the end of their stay, and the April sun hot.

Trevillian passed a thin hand down his thin brown hairy face, where bushy eyebrows were still dark, but the pointed beard white; and the effect, under a rather wide-brimmed brown hat, almost too Spanish for an English Bank Director. He was fond of saying that some of the best Cornish families had Spanish blood in their veins, whether Iberian or Armadesque he did not

specify. The theory in any case went well with his formalism, growing more formal every year.

Agatha having stayed in with a cold, he had been to service by himself. A poor gathering! The English out here were a rickety lot! Among the congregation to whom he had that morning read the Lessons he had noted, for instance, that old blackguard Telford, who had run off with two men's wives in his time, and was now living with a French woman, they said. What on earth was *he* doing in church? And that ostracised couple, the Gaddenhams, who had the villa near Roquebrune? She used his name, but they had never been married—for Gaddenham's wife was still alive. And, more seriously, had he observed Mrs. Rolfe, who before the war used to come with her husband—now in India—to The Cedars, to shoot the coverts in November. Young Lord Chesherford was hanging about her, they said. That would end in a scandal to a certainty! Never without uneasiness did he see that woman, with whom his daughter was on terms of some intimacy. Grass widows were dangerous, especially in a place like this. He must give Agatha a hint. Such doubtful people, he felt, had no business to attend divine service; yet it was difficult to disapprove of people coming to church, and after all—most of them did not! A man of the world, however strong a Churchman, could, of course, rub shoulders with anyone; but it was different when they came near one's womenfolk, or into the halls of one's formal beliefs. To encroach like that showed no sense of the fitness of things. He must certainly speak to Agatha!

The road had lain uphill, and he took breaths of the mimosa-scented air, carefully regulating them so as not to provoke his cough. He was about to proceed

on his way when a piano organ across the road burst into tune. The man who turned the handle was the usual moustachioed Italian, with restive eyes and a game leg; the animal who drew it the customary little grey donkey; the singer, the proverbial dark girl with an orange head-kerchief; the song she sang, the immemorial "Santa Lucia." Her brassy voice blared out the full metallic a's which seemed to hit the air, as hammers hit the wires of a cymbal. Trevillian had some music in his soul; he often started out for the Casino concert, though he generally arrived in the playing-rooms, not indeed to adventure more than a five-franc piece or two, for he disapproved of gambling, but because their motley irregularity titillated his formalism, made him feel like a boy a little out of school. He could distinguish, however, between several tunes, and knew this to be neither "God save the King," "Rule Britannia," "Tipperary," nor "Funiculi-Funicula!" Indeed, it had to him a kind of separate ring, a resonance oddly intimate, as if in some other life it had been the beating—the hammering rhythm of his heart. Queer sensation—quite a queer sensation! And he stood, blinking. Of course, he knew that tune now that he heard the words—Santa Lucia; but in what previous existence had its miauling awakened something deep, hot, almost savage within him, sweet and luring like a strange fruit or the scent of a tropical flower? "San-ta Luci-i-a! San-ta Luci-i-a!" Lost! And yet so close to the fingers of his recollection that they itched! The girl stopped singing and came across to him—a gaudy baggage, with her orange scarf, her beads, the whites of her eyes, and all those teeth! These Latins, emotional, vibrant, light-hearted and probably light-fingered—an

inferior race ! He felt in his pocket, produced a franc, and moved on slowly.

But at the next bend in the road he halted again. The girl had recommenced, in gratitude for his franc—
“ Santa Luci-i-a ! ” What was it buried in him, under the fallen leaves of years and years !

The pink clusters of a pepper tree drooped from behind a low garden wall right over him, while he stood there. The air tingled with its faint savourous perfume, true essence of the South. And again that conviction of a previous existence, of something sweet, burning, poignant, caught him in the Adam’s apple veiled by his beard. Was it something he had dreamed ? Was that the matter with him now—while the organ wailed, the girl’s song vibrated ? Trevillian’s stare lighted on the prickly pears and aloes above the low pink wall. The savagery of those plants jerked his mind forward almost to the pitch of—what ? A youth passed, smoking a maize-coloured cigarette, leaving a perfume of Latakia, that tobacco of his own youth, when he too smoked cigarettes made of its black, strong fragrant threads. He gazed blankly at the half-obliterated name on the dilapidated garden gate, and spelled it aloud : “ V l l a B e u S t e. Villa Beau Site ! Beau—— ! By God ! I’ve got it ! ”

At the unbecoming vigour of his ejaculation, a smile of release, wrinkling round his eyes, furrowed his thin brown cheeks. He went up to the gate. What a coincidence ! The very—— ! He stood staring into a tangled garden, through the fog of forty-five years, resting his large prayer-book with its big print on the top rail of the old green gate ; then, looking up and down the road like a boy about to steal cherries, he lifted the latch and passed in.

Nobody lived here now, he should say. The old pink villa, glimpsed some sixty yards away at the end of that little wilderness, was shuttered, and its paint seemed peeling off. Beau Site! That *was* the name! And this the gate he had been wont to use into this lower garden, invisible from the house. And yes—here was the little fountain, broken and discoloured now, with the same gargoyle face, and water still dripping from its mouth! And here—the old stone seat his cloak had so often covered. Grown over now—all of it; unpruned the lilacs, mimosas, palms making that dry rustling when the breeze crept into them. He opened his prayer-book, laid it on the seat, and carefully sat down—he never sat on unprotected stone. He had passed into another world screened from any eye by the overgrown shrubs and tangled foliage. And, slowly, while he sat there the frost of nearly half a century thawed.

Yes! Little by little, avidly, yet as it were unwillingly he remembered—sitting on his prayer-book, out of the sun, under the flowering tangled trees.

He had been twenty-six, just after he went into the family bank—he recollected—such a very sucking partner. A neglected cold had given him the first of those bronchial attacks of which he was now reaping the aftermath. Those were the days when, in the chill of a London winter, he would—dandy-like—wear thin underclothes and no overcoat. Still coughing at Easter, he had taken three weeks off and a ticket to Mentone. A cousin of his was engaged to a Russian girl whose family had a villa there, and he had pitched his tent in a little hotel almost next door. The Russians of *that* day were the Russians of the Turgenev novels, which Agatha had made him read. A simple, tri-

lingual family of gentlefolk, the Rostakovs, father, mother and two daughters—what was it they had called *him*—Philip Philipovitch? Monsieur Rostakov, with his beard, his witty French stories, imperfectly understood by young Trevillian, his zest for food and drink, his thick lips, and, as they said, his easy morals—quite a dog in his way! And Madame, née Princesse Nogárin (a Tartar strain in her, his cousin said); “spirituelle,” somewhat worn out by Monsieur Rostakov and her belief in the transmigration of souls. And Varvara, the eldest daughter—the one engaged; only seventeen, with deep-grey, truthful eyes, a broad grave face, dark hair, and a candour—by George!—which had almost frightened him. And the little one, Katrina, blue-eyed, snub-nosed, fair-haired, with laughing lips, yet very serious too—charming little creature, whose death from typhoid three years later had given him quite a shock! Delightful family, seen through the mists of time. And now, in all the world you couldn’t find a Russian family like that—gone, vanished from the face of the earth! Their estates had been—ah!—somewhere in South Russia, and a house near Yalta. Cosmopolitan, yet very Russian, with their samovar, and their “Zakouskas”—a word he had never learned to spell—and Rostakov’s little glasses of white vodka, and those caviare sandwiches that the girls and he used to take on their picnics to Gorbio, and Castellar, and Belle Enda, riding donkeys, and chaperoned by that amiable young German lady, their governess. . . . Germans, in those days—how different they were! How different the whole of life! The girls riding in their wide skirts, under parasols, the air unspoiled by the fumes of petrol, the carriages with their jangling-belled little horses and bright harness;

priests in black, soldiers in bright trousers and yellow shakoes; and beggars—plenty. The girls would gather wild flowers, and press them afterwards; and in the evening Varvara would look at him with her grave eyes and ask him whether he believed in a future life. He had no beliefs to speak of, then, if he remembered rightly; they had come with increasing income, family, and business responsibilities. It had always seemed to hurt her that he thought of sport and dress, and not of his soul. The Russians, in those days, seemed so tremendously concerned about the soul—an excellent thing, of course, but not what one talked of. Still that first fortnight had been quite idyllic. He remembered one Sunday afternoon—queer how such a little thing could stay in the mind—on the beach near Cap Martin, flicking sand off his boots with his handkerchief, and Varvara saying: “And then to your face again, Philip Philipovitch?” She was always saying things which made him feel uncomfortable. And in the little letter which Katrina wrote him a year later, with blue forget-me-nots all about the paper, she had reminded him of how he had blushed! Charming young girls—simple—no such, nowadays! The dew was off. They had thought Monte Carlo a vulgar place—what would they think of it now, by Jove! Even Rostakov only went there on the quiet—a *viveur*, that fellow, who would always be living a double life. Trevillian recollected how, under the spell of that idyllic atmosphere, and afraid of Varvara’s eyes, he himself had put off from day to day his visit to the celebrated haunt, until one evening when Madame Rostakov had *migraine* and the girls were at a party, he had sauntered to the station and embarked on a Monte Carlo train. How clearly it came back to him—the

winding path up through the Gardens, a beautiful still evening, scented and warm, the Casino orchestra playing the Love music from "Faust"—the one opera that he knew well. The darkness, strange with exotic foliage, glimmering with golden lamps—none of this glaring white electric light—had deeply impressed him, who, for all his youthful dandyism, had Puritanism in his blood and training. It was like going up to—well, not precisely heaven! And in his white beard old Trevillian uttered a slight cackle. Anyway, he had entered "the rooms" with a beating heart. He had no money to throw away in those days; by Jove! no! His father had kept him strictly to an allowance of four hundred a year, and his partnership was still in the apprentice stage. He had only some ten or twenty pounds to spare. But to go back to England and have his fellows say: "What? Monte Carlo, and never played?" was not to be thought of.

His first sensation in the "rooms" was disappointing. The decorations were florid, the people foreign, queer, ugly! For some time he stood listening to the chink of rake against coin, and the nasal twang of the croupiers' voices. Then he had gone up to a table to watch the game, which he had never played. That, at all events, was the same as now; that, and the expression on the gamblers' faces—the sharp, blind, crab-like absorption like no other human expression. And what a lot of old women! A nervous excitement had crept into his brain while he stood there, an itch into his fingers. But he was shy. All these people played with such deadly calm, seemed so utterly familiar with it all. At last he had reached over the shoulder of a dark-haired woman sitting in front of him, put down a five-franc piece and called out the word: "*Vingt*." A rake

shovelled it forward on to the number with an indifferent click. The ball rolled: "*Quatorze, Rouge pair et manque.*" His five-franc piece was raked away; but he—Philip Trevillian—had gambled at Monte Carlo, and at once he had seemed to see Varvara's eyes with something of amusement in their candour, and to hear her voice: "But to gamble! How silly, Philip Philipovitch!" Then the man sitting to his left got up, and he had slipped down into the empty chair. Once seated he knew that he must play. So he pushed another five-franc piece on to black, and received its counterpart. Now he was quits; and continuing that simple stake with varying success he began taking in the faces of his neighbours. On his left he had an old Englishman in evening dress, ruddy, with chubby lips, who played in gold pieces and seemed winning rather heavily; opposite, in a fabulous shawl, a bird-like old woman, with a hook nose, and a man who looked like a Greek bandit in a frock coat. To his right was the dark-haired woman over whose shoulder he had leaned. An agreeable perfume, as of jasmine blossoms, floated from her. She had some tablets, and six or seven gold pieces before her, but seemed to have stopped playing. Out of the tail of his eye Trevillian scrutinised her profile. She was by far the most attractive woman he had seen in here. And he felt, suddenly, uninterested in the fate of his five-franc pieces. Under the thin dark brows a little drawn down, he could see that her eyes were dark and velvety. Her face was rather pointed, delicate, faintly powdered in the foreign fashion. She wore a low dress, but with a black lace scarf thrown over her gleaming shoulders, and something that glimmered in her dark hair. She was not English; but what he could not tell. He won twice running on black, left

his stake untouched, and was conscious that she pushed one of her own gold pieces on to black. Again black won; again he left his stake, and she hers. To be linked with her by that following of his luck was agreeable to young Trevillian. The devil might care—he would leave his winnings down! Again and again, till he had won eight times on black, he left his stake, and his neighbour followed suit. A pile of gold was mounting in front of each of them. The eyes of the hawk-like old woman opposite, like those of a crustacean in some book of Natural History, seemed pushed out from her face; a little hard smile on her thin lips seemed saying: “Wait, it will all go back!” The jasmine perfume from his neighbour grew stronger, as though disengaged by increasing emotion; he could see her white neck heave under its black lace. She reached her hand out as though to gather in her winnings. In bravado Trevillian sat unmoving. Her eyes slid round to his, she withdrew her hand. The little ball rolled. Black! He heard her sigh of relief; she touched his arm. “*Retirez!*” she whispered, “*retirez, Monsieur!*” and, sweeping in her winnings, she got up. Trevillian hesitated just a moment, then with the thought: “If I stay, I lose sight of her!” he too reached out, and gathering in his pile, left the table. Starting with a five-franc piece, in nine successful coups he had won just over a hundred pounds. His neighbour, who had started with a louis, in seven coups—he calculated rapidly—must have won the same. “*Seize, Rouge pair et manque!*” Just in time! Elated, Trevillian turned away. There was the graceful figure of his dark neighbour, threading the throng; and without deliberate intention, yet longing not to lose sight of her, he followed. A check in her progress

brought him so close, however, that he was at infinite pains to seem unconscious. She turned and saw him. "Ah! *Merci, Monsieur!* I tank you moch." "It's for me to thank you!" he stammered. The dark lady smiled. "I have the instinct," she said in her broken English, "for others—not for myself. I am unlucky. It is the first time you play, Sare? I tought so. Do not play again. Give me that promise; it will make me 'appy."

Her eyes were looking into his. Never in his life had he seen anything so fascinating as her face with its slightly teasing smile; her figure in the lacy black dress swinging out Spanish fashion from the hips, and the scarf flung about her shoulders. He had made the speech, then, which afterwards seemed to him so foreign.

"Charmed to promise anything that will make you happy, Madame."

She clasped her hands like a pleased child.

"That is a bargain; now I have repaid you."

"May I find your carriage?"

"I am walkin', Monsieur."

With desperate courage, he had murmured:

"Then may I escort you?"

"But certainly."

Sitting on his prayer-book, Trevillian burrowed into the past. What had he felt, thought, fancied, in those moments while she had gone to get her cloak? Who and what was she? Into what whirlpool drawing him? How nearly he had bolted—back to the idyllic, to Varvara's searching candour, and Katrina's laughing innocence, before she was there beside him, lace veiling her hair, face, eyes, like an Eastern woman, and her fingers had slipped under his sleeve. . . . What a walk.

What a sense of stepping into the unknown ; strange intimacy, and perfect ignorance ! Perhaps every man had some such moment in his life—of pure romance ; of adventuring at all and any cost ! He had restrained the impulse to press that slender hand closely to his side, had struggled to preserve the perfect delicacy worthy of the touching confidence of so beautiful a lady. Italian, Spanish, Polish, Bohemian ? Married, widowed ? She told him nothing—he asked no questions. Instinct or shyness kept him dumb, but with a whirling brain. And the night above them had seemed the starriest ever seen, the sweetest scented, the most abandoned by all except himself and her. They had come to the gate of this very garden ; and, opening it, she had said :

“ Here is my home. You have been perfect for me, Monsieur.”

Her lightly resting fingers were withdrawn. Trevillian remembered—with a sort of wonder—how he had kissed those fingers.

“ I am always at your service, Madame.”

Her lips had parted ; her eyes had an arch sweetness he had never seen before or since in woman.

“ Every night I play. *Adieu !*”

He had listened to her footsteps on the path—watched lights go up in the house which looked so empty now behind him, watched them put out again ; and, retracing his steps, had learned by heart their walk from the Casino, till he was sure he could not miss his way to that garden gate by day or night. . . . A fluster of breeze came into the jungle where he sat, and released the dry rustle of the palm tree leaves. “ *On fait des folies !*” as the French put it. Loose lot—the French ! Queer, what young men would go through when they

were "making madresses." And, plucking a bit of lilac, old Trevillian put it to his nose, as though seeking explanation for the madresses of youth. What had he been like then? Thin as a lath, sunburnt—he used to pride himself on being sunburnt—a little black moustache; a dandy about clothes! The memory of his youthful looks warmed him, sitting there, chilly from old age. . . .

"*On fait des folies!*" All next day he had been restless, uneasy at the Villa Rostakov under the question in Varvara's eyes—and Lord knew what excuse he had made for not going there that evening! Ah! And what of his solemn resolutions to find out all about his dark lady, not to run his head into some foreign noose, not to compromise her or himself? They had all gone out of his head the moment he set eyes on her again, and he had never learned anything but her name, Iñez, in all those three weeks; nor told anything of himself—as if both had felt the knowledge must destroy romance. When had he known himself of interest to her—the second night—the third? The look in her eyes; the pressure of her arm against his own! On this very seat, with his cloak spread to guard her from the chill, he had whispered his turbulent avowals! Not free! No such woman could be free. What did it matter? Disinheritance—Ostracism—Exile! All such considerations had burned like straws in the fire he had felt, sitting by her in the darkness, his arm about her, her shoulder pressed to his. With mournful mockery she had gazed at him, kissed his forehead, slipped away up the dark garden. God! What a night after that! Wandering, up and down, along by the sea—devoured! Funny to look back on—deuced funny! A woman's face to have such power!

And with a little shock he remembered that never in all the few weeks of that mad business had he seen her face by daylight! Of course, he had left Mentone at once—no offering his madness up to the candid eyes of those two girls, to the cynical stare of that old *viveur* Rostakov! But no going home, though his leave was up; he was his own master yet awhile, thanks to his winnings. And then—the deluge! Literally—a night when the rain came down in torrents, drenching him through cape and clothes while he stood waiting for her. It was after that drenching night which had kept them apart that she had returned his passion. . . . A wild young devil! the madness of those nights, beneath these trees by the old fountain! How he used to sit waiting on this bench in the darkness with heart fluttering, trembling, aching with expectancy? . . . Gad! how he had ached and fluttered on that seat! What fools young men could be! And yet, in all his life had there been weeks so wildly sweet as those? Weeks the madness of which could stir in him still this strange youthful warmth. Rubbing his veined thin hands together, he held them out into a streak of sunlight and closed his eyes. . . . There, coming through the gate into the deeper shadow, dark in her black dress—always black—the gleam of her neck when she bent and pressed his head to it! Through the rustling palm leaves the extinct murmuring of their two voices, the beating of their two hearts. . . . Madness indeed! His back gave a little crick. He had been very free from lumbago lately! Confound it—a premonitory twinge! Close to his feet, a lizard rustled out into the patch of sunlight, motionless but for tongue and eyes, looked at him with head to one side—queer, quick, dried-looking little object! . . . And then—the

end! What a Jezebel of cruelty he had thought her! Now he could see its wisdom and its mercy. By George! She had blown their wild weeks out like a candle flame! Vanished! Vanished into the unknown as she had come from the unknown; left him to go, haggard and burnt-up, back to England and Bank routine, to the social and moral solidity of a pillar of society. . . .

Like that lizard whisking its tail and vanishing beneath the dead dry leaves, so she had vanished—as if into the earth. Could she ever have felt for him as he for her? Did women ever know such consuming fires? Trevillian shrugged his thin shoulders. She had seemed to; but—how tell? Queer cattle—women!

Two nights he had sat there—waiting—sick with anxiety and longing. A third day he had watched outside the villa, closed, shuttered, abandoned—not a sound from it, not a living thing, but one white and yellow cat. He pitied himself even now, thinking of that last vigil. For three days more he had hung around, haunting Casino, garden, villa—— No sign—no sign! . . .

Trevillian rose; his back had given him another twinge. He examined the seat and his open prayer-book. Had he overlapped it on to damp stone? He frowned, smoothing superstitiously the pages a little creased and over-flattened by his weight. Closing the book he went towards the gate. Had those passionate hours been the best or the worst of his life? He did not know.

He moved out into the hot sunshine and up the road. Round the corner he came suddenly abreast of the old villa. "It was here I stood," he thought: "Just

here." What was that caterwauling? Ah! The girl and the organ—there they were again! What! Why, of course! That long-ago morning a barrel organ had come while he stood there in despair. He could see it still, grinding away, with a monkey on it, and a woman singing that same silly tune. With a dry, dusty feeling he turned and walked on. What had he been thinking of before? Oh! Ah! The Rolfe woman, and that young fool Chesherford. Yes, he would certainly warn Agatha; certainly warn her! They were a loose lot out here!

1921.

THE MOTHER STONE

It was after dinner, and five elderly Englishmen were discussing the causes of the war.

"Well," said Travers, a big, fresh-coloured grey-beard, with little twinkling eyes and very slow speech, "you gentlemen know more about it than I do, but I bet you I can lay my finger on the cause of the war at any minute."

There was an instant clamour of jeering. But a man called Askew, who knew Travers well, laughed and said: "Come, let's have it!" Travers turned those twinkling little eyes of his slowly round the circle, and with heavy, hesitating modesty began:

"Well, Mr. Askew, it was in '67 or '68 that this happened to a great big feller of my acquaintance named Ray—one of those fellers, you know, that are always on the look-out to make their fortunes and never do. This Ray was coming back south one day after a huntin' trip he'd been in what's now called Bechuanaland, and he was in a pretty bad way when he walked one evenin' into the camp of one of those wanderin' Boers. That class of Boer has disappeared now. They had no farms of their own, but just moved on with their stock and their boys; and when they came to good pasture they'd outspan and stay there till they'd cleared it out—and then trek on again. Well, this old Boer told Ray to come right in and take a meal; and Heaven knows what it was made of, for those old Boers they'd eat the devil himself without onion sauce,

and relish him. After the meal the old Boer and Ray sat smokin' and yarnin' in the door of the tent, because in those days these wanderin' Boers used tents. Right close by in the front the children were playin' in the dust, a game like marbles with three or four round stones, and they'd pitch 'em up to another stone they called the Moer-Klip, or Mother Stone—one, two, and pick up; two, three, and pick up—you know the game of marbles. Well, the sun was settin', and presently Ray noticed this Moer-Klip that they were pitchin' 'em up to shinin'; and he looked at it, and he said to the old Boer: 'What's that stone the children are playin' with?' And the old Boer looked at him and looked at the stone, and said: 'It's just a stone,' and went on smokin'.

"Well, Ray went down on his knees and picked up the stone and weighed it in his hand. About the size of a hazel-nut it was and looked—well, it looked like a piece of alum; but the more he looked at it the more he thought: 'By Jove, I believe it's a diamond!'

"So he said to the old Boer: 'Where did the children get this stone?' And the old Boer said: 'Oh! the shepherd picked it up somewhere.' And Ray said: 'Where did he pick it up?' And the old Boer waved his hand, and said: 'Over the kopje, there, beyond the river. How should I know, brother?—a stone is a stone!' So Ray said: 'You let me take this stone away with me.' And the old Boer went on smokin', and he said: 'One stone's the same as another. Take it, brother.' And Ray said: 'If it's what I think, I'll give you half the price I get for it.'

"The old Boer smiled and said: 'That's all right, brother; take it, take it!'

"The next morning Ray left this old Boer, and, when

he was going, he said to him : ' Well,' he said, ' I believe this is a valuable stone ! ' And the old Boer smiled because he knew one stone was the same as another.

" The first place Ray came to was C——, and he went to the hotel ; and in the evenin' he began talkin' about the stone, and they all laughed at him, because in those days nobody had heard of diamonds in South Africa. So presently he lost his temper and pulled out the stone and showed it round ; but nobody thought it was a diamond, and they all laughed at him the more. Then one of the fellers said : ' If it's a diamond it ought to cut glass.'

" Ray took the stone, and, by Jove ! he cut his name on the window, and there it is—I've seen it—on the bar window of that hotel. Well, next day, you bet, he travelled straight back to where the old Boer told him the shepherd had picked up the stone, and he went to a native chief called Jointje, and said to him : ' Jointje,' he said, ' I go a journey. While I go, you go about and send all your " boys " about, and look for all the stones that shine like this one ; and when I come back, if you find me plenty, I give you gun.' And Jointje said : ' That all right, boss.'

" And Ray went down to Cape Town and took the stone to a jeweller, and the jeweller told him it was a diamond of about 30 or 40 carats, and gave him five hundred pounds for it. So he bought a waggon and a span of oxen to give to the old Boer, and went back to Jointje. The niggers had collected skinfuls of stones of all kinds, and out of all the skinfuls Ray found three or four diamonds. So he went to work and got another feller to back him, and between them they made the Government move. The rush began, and they

found that place near Kimberley; and after that they found De Beers, and after that Kimberley itself."

Travers stopped and looked around him.

"Ray made his fortune, I suppose?"

"No, Mr. Askew; the unfortunate feller made next to nothin'. He was one of those fellers that never do any good for themselves."

"But what has all this to do with the war?"

Again Travers looked round, and more slowly than ever said:

"Without that game of marbles, would there have been a Moer-Klip—without the Moer-Klip, would there have been a Kimberley—without Kimberley, would there have been a Rhodes—without a Rhodes would there have been a Raid—without a Raid, would the Boers have started armin'—if the Boers hadn't armed, would there have been a Transvaal War? And if there hadn't been the Transvaal War, would there have been the incident of those two German ships we held up, and all the general feelin' in Germany that gave the Kaiser the chance to start his Navy programme in 1900? And if the Germans hadn't built their Navy, would their heads have swelled till they challenged the world, and should we have had this war?"

He slowly drew a hand from his pocket and put it on the table. On the little finger was blazing an enormous diamond.

"My father," he said, "bought it of the jeweller."

The Mother Stone glittered and glowed, and the five Englishmen fixed their eyes on it in silence. Some of them had been in the Boer War, and three of them had sons in this. At last one of them said:

"Well, that's seeing God in a dew-drop with a vengeance. What about the old Boer?"

Travers's little eyes twinkled.

"Well," he said, "Ray told me the old feller just looked at him as if he thought he'd done a damn silly thing to give him a waggon; and he nodded his old head and said, laughin' in his beard: 'Wish you good luck, brother, with your stone.' You couldn't humbug that old Boer; he knew one stone was the same as another."

1914.

PEACE MEETING

COLIN WILDERTON, coming from the west on his way to the Peace Meeting, fell in with John Rudstock, coming from the north, and they walked on together. After they had commented on the news from Russia and the inflation of money, Rudstock said abruptly :

"We shall have a queer meeting, I expect."

"God knows ! " answered Wilderton.

And both smiled, conscious that they were uneasy, but predetermined not to show it under any circumstances. Their smiles were different, for Rudstock was a black-browed man with dark beard and strong, thick figure, and Wilderton a very light-built, grey-haired man, with kindly eyes and no health. He had supported the war an immense time, and had only recently changed his attitude. In common with all men of warm feelings, he had at first been profoundly moved by the violation of Belgium. The horrors of the German advance through that little country and through France, to which he was temperamentally attached, had stirred in him a vigorous detestation, freely expressed in many ways. Extermination, he had felt all those early months, was hardly good enough for brutes who could commit such crimes against humanity and justice ; and his sense of the need for signal defeat of a noxious force riding rough-shod over the hard-won decency of human life had survived well into the third year of the war. He hardly knew himself when his feeling had begun—not precisely to change,

but to run, as it were, in a different channel. A man of generous instincts, artistic tastes and unsteady nerves too thinly coated with that God-given assurance which alone fits a man for knowing what is good for the world, he had become gradually haunted by the thought that he was not laying down his own life, but only the lives of his own and other people's sons. And the consideration that he was laying them down for the benefit of their own future had lost its grip on him. At moments he was still able to see that the war he had so long supported had not yet attained sufficient defeat of the Prussian military machine to guarantee that future ; but his pity and distress for all these young lives cut down without a chance to flower had grown till he had become, as it were, a gambler. What good—he would think—to secure the future of the young in a Europe which would soon have no young ? Every country was suffering hideously—the criminal country not least, thank God ! Suppose the war were to go on for another year, two, three years, and then stop from sheer exhaustion of both sides, while all the time these boys were being killed and maimed, for nothing more, perhaps, than could be obtained to-day. What then ? True the Government promised victory, but they never promised it within a year. Governments did not die ; what if they were to go on promising it a year hence, till everybody else was dead ! Did history ever show that victory in the present could guarantee the future ? Besides, even if not so openly defeated as was desirable, this damnable Prussianism had got such a knock that it could never again do what it had in the past. These last, however, were but side reflections, toning down for him the fact that his nerves could no longer stand this vicarious butchery of youth. And so he had

gradually become that "traitor to his country, a weak-kneed, peace-by-negotiation man." Physically his knees really were weak, and he used to smile a wry smile when he read the expression.

John Rudstock, of vigorous physique, had opposed the war, on principle, from the start, not because, any more than Wilderton, he approved of Prussianism, but because, as an essentially combative personality, he opposed everything supported by a majority; the greater the majority, the more bitterly he opposed it; and no one would have been more astonished than he at hearing that this was his principle. He preferred to put it that he did not believe in opposing force by force. In peace-time he was a "stalwart," in war-time a "renegade."

The street leading to the chapel which had been engaged seemed quiet enough. Designed to make an impression on public opinion, every care had been taken that the meeting should not attract the public eye. God's protection had been enlisted, but two policemen also stood at the entrance, and half a dozen others were suspiciously near by. A thin trickle of persons, mostly women, were passing through the door. Colin Wilderton, making his way up the aisle to the platform, wrinkled his nose, thinking: "Stuffy in here." It had always been his misfortune to love his neighbours individually, but to dislike them in a bunch. On the platform some fifteen men and women were already gathered. He seated himself modestly in the back row, while John Rudstock, less retiring, took his place at the chairman's right hand. The speakers began with a precipitancy hardly usual at a public meeting. Wilderton listened, and thought: "Dreadfully cliché; why can't someone say straight out that

boys enough have been killed?" He had become conscious, too, of a muttering noise, as of the tide coming in on a heavy wind; it broke suddenly into component parts—human voices clamouring outside. He heard blows raining on the door, saw sticks smashing in the windows. The audience had risen to its feet, some rushing to defend the doors, others standing irresolute. John Rudstock was holding up the chair he had been sitting on. Wilderton had just time to think, "I thought so," when a knot of young men in khaki burst into the chapel, followed by a crowd. He knew he was not much good in a scrimmage, but he placed himself at once in front of the nearest woman. At that moment, however, some soldiers, pouring through a side-door, invaded the platform from behind, and threw him down the steps. He arrived at the bottom with a bump, and was unable to get up because of the crowd around him. Someone fell over him; it was Rudstock, swearing horribly. He still had the chair in his hand, for it hit Wilderton a nasty blow. The latter saw his friend recover his feet and swing the weapon, and with each swing down went some friend or foe, until he had cleared quite a space round him. Wilderton, still weak and dizzy from his fall, sat watching this Homeric battle. Chairs, books, stools, sticks were flying at Rudstock, who parried them, or diverted their course so that they carried on and hit Wilderton, or crashed against the platform. He heard Rudstock roar like a lion and saw him advance, swinging his chair; down went two young men in khaki, down went a third in mufti; a very tall young soldier, also armed with a chair, dashed forward, and the two fought in single combat. Wilderton had got on his feet by now, and, adjusting his eyeglass, for

he could see little without, he caught up a hymn-book, and, flinging it at the crowd with all his force, shouted : " Hoobloodyray ! " and followed with his fists clenched. One of them encountered what must have been the jaw of an Australian, it was so hard against his hand ; he received a vicious punch in the ribs and was again seated on the ground. He could still hear his friend roaring, and the crash of chairs meeting in mid-air. Something fell heavily on him. It was Rudstock—he was insensible. There was a momentary lull, and peering up as best he could from underneath the body, Wilderton saw that the platform had been cleared of all its original inhabitants, and was occupied mainly by youths in navy blue and khaki. A voice called out :

" Order ! Silence ! "

Rubbing Rudstock's temples with brandy from a flask which he had had the foresight to slip into his pocket, he listened as best he could, with the feet of the crowd jostling his anatomy.

" Here we are, boys," the voice was saying, " and here we'll always be when these treacherous blighters try their games on. No peace, no peace at any price ! We've got to show them that we won't have it. Leave the women alone—though they ought to be ashamed of themselves ; but for the men—the skunks—shoot-ing's too good for them. Let them keep off the course or we'll make them. We've broken up this meeting, and we'll break up every meeting that tries to talk of peace. Three cheers for the old flag ! "

During the cheers which followed Wilderton was discovering signs of returning consciousness in his friend ; for Rudstock had begun to breathe heavily. Pouring some brandy into his mouth, he propped him up as best he could against a wooden structure, which

he suddenly perceived to be the chapel's modest pulpit. A thought came to his dazed brain. If he could get up into that, as if he had dropped from Heaven, they might almost listen to him. He disengaged his legs from under Rudstock and began crawling up the steps on hands and knees. Once in the pulpit he sat on the floor below the level of visibility, getting his breath and listening to the cheers. Then, smoothing his hair, he rose, and waited for the cheers to stop. He had calculated rightly. His sudden appearance, his grey hair, eyeglass and smile deceived them for a moment. There was a hush.

"Boys!" he said, "listen to me a second. I want to ask you something. What on earth do you think we came here for? Simply and solely because we can't bear to go on seeing you killed day after day, month after month, year after year. That's all, and it's Christ's truth. Amen!"

A strange gasp and mutter greeted this little speech; then a dull voice called out:

"Pro-German!"

Wilderton flung up his hand.

"The Germans to hell!" he said simply.

The dull voice repeated:

"Pro-German!" And the speaker on the platform called out: "Come out of that! When we want you to beg us off we'll let you know."

Wilderton spun round to him.

"You're all wonderful!" he began, but a hymn-book hit him fearfully on the forehead, and he sank down into the bottom of the pulpit. This last blow, coming on the top of so many others, had deprived him of intelligent consciousness; he was but vaguely aware of more speeches, cheers and tramplings, then

of a long hush, and presently found himself walking out of the chapel door between Rudstock and a policeman. It was not the door by which they had entered, and led to an empty courtyard.

"Can you walk?" said the policeman.

Wilderton nodded.

"Then walk off!" said the policeman, and withdrew again into the house of God.

The two walked, holding each other's arms, a little unsteadily at first. Rudstock had a black eye and a cut on his ear, the blood from which had stained his collar and matted his beard. Wilderton's coat was torn, his forehead bruised, his cheek swollen, and he had a pain in his back which prevented him from walking very upright. They did not speak, but in an archway did what they could, with pins and handkerchiefs and by turning up Rudstock's coat collar, to regain something of respectability. When they were once more under way Rudstock said coldly:

"I heard you. You should have spoken for yourself. I came, as you know, because I don't believe in opposing force by force. At the next peace meeting we hold I shall make that plainer."

Wilderton murmured:

"Yes, yes; I saw you—I'm sure you will. I apologise; I was carried away."

Rudstock went on in a deep voice:

"As for those young devils, they may die to a man if they like! Take my advice and let them alone."

Wilderton smiled on the side which was not swollen.

"Yes," he said sadly, "it does seem difficult to persuade them to go on living. Ah, well!"

"Ah, well!" he said again, five minutes later,

"they're wonderful—poor young beggars! I'm very unhappy, Rudstock!"

"I'm not," said Rudstock, "I've enjoyed it in a way! Good-night!"

They shook hands, screwing up their mouths with pain, for their fists were badly bruised, and parted, Rudstock going to the north, Wilderton to the west.

1917.

A STRANGE THING

Nor very long ago, during a sojourn in a part of the West Country never yet visited by me, I went out one fine but rather cold March morning for a long ramble. I was in one of those disillusioned moods which come to writers bankrupt of ideas, bankrupt of confidence, a prey to that recurrent despair, the struggle with which makes the profession of the pen—as a friend once said to me—"a manly one." 'Yes,' I was thinking, for all that the air was so brisk, and the sun so bright, 'nothing comes to me nowadays, no flashes of light, none of those suddenly shaped visions that bring cheer and warmth to a poor devil's heart, and set his brain and pen to driving on. A bad business!' And my eyes, wandering over the dip and rise, the woods, the moor, the rocks of that fine countryside, took in the loveliness thereof with the profound discontent of one who, seeing beauty, feels that he cannot render it. The high lane-banks had just been pollarded; one could see right down over the fields and gorse and bare woods tinged with that rosy brown of beech and birch twigs, and the dusty saffron of the larches. And suddenly my glance was arrested by something vivid, a sort of black and white excitement in the air. 'Aha!' I thought, 'a magpie. Two! Three! Good! Is it an omen?' The birds had risen at the bottom of a field, their twining, fluttering voyage—most decorative of all bird flights—was soon lost in the wood beyond, but something it had left behind—in my heart; I felt

more hopeful, less inclined to think about the failure of my spirit, better able to give myself up to this new country I was passing through. Over the next rise in the very winding lane I heard the sound of brisk church bells, and not three hundred yards beyond came to a village green, where knots of men dressed in the dark clothes, light ties and bowler hats of village festivity, and of women smartened up beyond belief, were gathered, chattering, round the yard of an old grey, square-towered church.

‘What’s going on?’ I thought. ‘It’s not Sunday, not the birthday of a potentate, and surely they don’t keep saint days in this manner. It must be a wedding. Yes—there’s a favour! Let’s go in and see!’ And, passing the expectant groups, I entered the church and made my way up the aisle. There was already a fair sprinkling of folk all turned round towards the door, and the usual licensed buzz and whisper of a wedding congregation. The church, as seems usual in remote parishes, had been built all those centuries ago to hold a population in accordance with the expectations of its tenet, “Be fruitful and multiply.” But the whole population could have been seated in a quarter of its space. It was lofty and unwarmed save by excitement and the smell of bear’s-grease. There was certainly more animation than I had ever seen or savoured in a truly rural district.

The bells, which had been ringing with a sort of languid joviality, fell now into the hurried crashing which marks the approach of a bride, and the people I had passed outside came thronging in. I perceived a young man—little more than a boy—who by his semi-detachment, the fumbling of his gloved hands, and the sheepishness of the smile on his good-looking

open face, was obviously the bridegroom. I liked the looks of him—a cut above the usual village bumpkin—something free and kind about his face. But no one was paying him the least attention. It was for the bride they were waiting; and I myself began to be excited. What would this young thing be like? Just the ordinary village maiden with tight cheeks and dress, coarse veil, high colour, and eyes like a rabbit's; or something—something like that little Welsh girl on the hills whom I once passed and whose peer I have never since seen? Bending forward I accosted an apple-faced woman in the next pew. "Can you tell me who the bride is?"

Regarding me with the grey, round, defensive glance that one bestows on strangers, she replied:

"Aw, don't 'ee know? 'Tis Gwenny Mara—prettiest, brightest maid in these parts." And jerking her thumb towards the neglected bridegroom, she added: "He's a lucky young chap. She'm a sunny maid, for sure, and a gude maid, tu."

Somehow the description did not reassure me, and I prepared for the worst.

A bubble, a stir, a rustle!

Like everyone else, I turned frankly round. She was coming up the aisle on the arm of a hard-faced, rather gipsy-looking man dressed in a farmer's very best.

I can only tell you that to see her coming down the centre of that grey church amongst all those dark-clothed people was like watching the dance of a sunbeam. Never had I seen a face so happy, sweet, and radiant. Smiling, eager, just lost enough to her surroundings, her hair unconquerably golden through the coarse veil; her dancing eyes clear and dark as a

peat pool—she was the prettiest sight. One could only think of a young apple tree with the spring sun on its blossom. She had that kind of infectious brightness which comes from very simple goodness. It was quite a relief to have taken a fancy to the young man's face and to feel that she was passing into good hands.

The only flowers in the church were early daffodils, but those first children of the sun were somehow extraordinarily appropriate to the wedding of this girl. When she came out she was pelted with them, and with that miserable confetti, without which not even the simplest souls can pass to bliss, it seems. There are things in life which make one feel good—sunshine, most music, all flowers, many children, some animals, clouds, mountains, bird-songs, blue sky, dancing, and here and there a young girl's face. And I had the feeling that all of us there felt good for the mere seeing of her.

When she had driven away, I found myself beside a lame old man with whiskers and delightful eyes, who continued to smile after the carriage had quite vanished. Noticing, perhaps, that I, too, was smiling, he said: "'Tis a funny thing, tu, when a maid like that gets married—makes you go all of a tremble—so it du." And to my nod he added: "Brave bit o' sunshine—we'll miss her hereabout; not a doubt of it. We ain't got another one like that."

"Was that her father?" I asked, for the want of something to say. With a sharpish look at my face he shook his head.

"No, she an't got no parents, Mr. Mara bein' her uncle, as you may say. No, she an't got no parents," he repeated, and there was something ill at ease, yet

juicy, about his voice, as though he knew things that he would not tell.

Since there was nothing more to wait for, I went up to the little inn and ordered bread and cheese. The male congregation was wetting its whistle noisily within, but, as a stranger, I had the verandah to myself, and, finishing my simple lunch in the March sunlight, I paid and started on. Taking at random one of the three lanes which debouched from the bottom of the green, I meandered on between high banks, happy in the consciousness of not knowing at all where it would lead me—that essential of a country ramble. Except one cottage in a bottom and one farm on a rise, I passed nothing, nobody. The spring was late in these parts, the buds had hardly formed as yet on any trees, and now and then between the bursts of sunlight a few fine specks of snow would come drifting past me on the wind. Close to a group of pines at a high corner the lane dipped sharply down to a long farmhouse standing back in its yard, where three carts were drawn up and an empty waggonette with its shafts in the air. And suddenly, by some broken daffodils on the seats and confetti on the ground, I perceived that I had stumbled on the bride's home, where the wedding feast was, no doubt, in progress.

Gratifying but by no means satisfying my curiosity by gazing at the lichened stone and thatch of the old house, at the pigeons, pigs, and hens at large between it and the barns, I passed on down the lane, which turned up steeply to the right beside a little stream. To my left was a long larch wood, to my right rough fields with many trees. The lane finished at a gate below the steep moorside crowned by a rocky tor. I stood there leaning on the top bar, debating whether I should ascend

or no. The bracken had, most of it, been cut in the autumn, and not a hundred yards away the furze was being swaled; the little blood-red flames and the blue smoke, the yellow blossoms of the gorse, the sunlight, and some flecks of drifting snow were mingled in an amazing tangle of colour.

I had made up my mind to ascend the tor and was pushing through the gate when suddenly I saw a woman sitting on a stone under the wall bordering the larch wood. She was holding her head in her hands, rocking her body to and fro, and her eyes were evidently shut, for she had not noticed me. She wore a blue serge dress, her hat reposed beside her, and her dark hair was straggling about her face. That face, all blowsy and flushed, was at once wild and stupefied. A face which has been beautiful, coarsened and swollen by life and strong emotion, is a pitiful enough sight. Her dress, hat, and the way her hair had been done were redolent of the town, and of that unnameable something which clings to women whose business it is to attract men. And yet there was a gipsyish look about her, as though she had not always been of the town.

The sight of a woman's unrestrained distress in the very heart of untouched nature is so rare that one must be peculiar to remain unmoved. And there I stood, not knowing what on earth to do. She went on rocking herself to and fro, her stays creaking, and a faint moaning sound coming from her lips; and suddenly she drooped over her lap, her hands fallen to her sides, as though she had gone into a kind of coma. How go on and leave her thus? Yet how intrude on what did not seem to me mere physical suffering?

In that quandary I stood and watched. This corner was quite sheltered from the wind, the sun almost hot,

and the breath of the swaling reached one in the momentary calms. For three full minutes she had not moved a finger, till, beginning to think she had really fainted, I went up to her. From her drooped body came a scent of heat and of stale violet powder, and I could see, though the east wind had out-raddled them, traces of rouge on her cheeks ; their surface had a sort of swollen defiance, but underneath, as it were, a wasted look. Her breathing sounded faint and broken.

Mustering courage, I touched her on the arm. She raised her head and looked up. Her eyes were the best things she had left ; they must have once been very beautiful. Blood-shot now from the wind, their wild, stupefied look passed after a moment into the peculiar, half-bold, half-furtive stare of women of a certain sort. She did not speak, and in my embarrassment I drew out the flask of port I always take with me on my rambles, and stammered :

" I beg your pardon—are you feeling faint ? Would you care—— ? " And, unscrewing the top, I held out the flask. She stared at it a moment blankly, then taking it, said :

" That's kind of you. I feel to want it, tu." And, putting it to her lips, she drank, tilting back her head. Perhaps it was the tell-tale softness of her u's, perhaps the naturally strong lines of her figure thus bent back, but somehow the plumage of the town bird seemed to drop off her suddenly.

She handed back the flask, as empty as it had ever been, and said, with a hard smile :

" I daresay you thought me funny sittin' 'ere like that."

" I thought you were ill."

She laughed without the faintest mirth, and muttered :

"I did go on, didn't I?" Then, almost fiercely, added: "I got some reason, too. Secin' the old place again after all these years." Her dark eyes, which the wine seemed to have cleared and boldened, swept me up and down, taking me in, making sure, perhaps, whether or no she had ever seen me, and what sort of a brute I might be. Then she said: "I was born here. Are you from these parts?" I shook my head. "No, from the other side of the county."

She laughed. Then, after a moment's silence, said abruptly:

"I been to a weddin'—first I've seen since I was a girl."

Some instinct kept me silent.

"My own daughter's weddin', but nobody didn't know me—not likely."

I had dropped down under the shelter of the wall on to a stone opposite, and at those words looked at her with interest indeed. She—this coarsened, wasted, suspiciously-scented woman of the town—the mother of that sweet, sunny child I had just seen married? And again instinctively silent about my own presence at the wedding, I murmured:

"I thought I saw some confetti in that farmyard as I came up the lane."

She laughed again.

"Confetti—that's the little pink and white and blue things—plenty o' that"; and she added fiercely: "My own brother didn' know me—let alone my girl. How should she?—I haven't seen her since she was a baby—she was a laughin' little thing"; and she gazed past me with that look in the eyes as of people who are staring back into the bygone. "I guess we was laughin' when we got her. 'Twas just here—summer-

time. I 'ad the moon in my blood that night, right enough." Then, turning her eyes on my face, she added: "That's what a girl *will* 'ave, you know, once in a while, and like as not it'll du for her. Only thirty-five now, I am, an' pretty nigh the end o' my tether. What can you expect?—I'm a gay woman. Did for me right enough. Her father's dead, tu."

"Do you mean," I said, "because of your child?"

She nodded. "I suppose you can say that. They made me bring an order against him. He wouldn't pay up, so he went and enlisted, an' in tu years 'e was dead in the Boer War—so it killed him right enough. But there she is, a sweet sprig if ever there was one. That's a strange thing, isn't it?" And she stared straight before her in a sudden silence. Nor could I find anything to say, slowly taking in the strangeness of this thing. That girl, so like a sunbeam, of whom the people talked as though she were a blessing in their lives—her coming into life to have been the ruin of the two who gave her being!

The woman went on dully: "Funny how I knew she was goin' to be married—'twas a farmer told me—comes to me regular when he goes to Exeter market. I always knew he came from near my old home. 'There's a weddin' on Tuesday,' 'e says, 'I'd like to be the bridegroom at. Prettiest, sunniest maid you ever saw'; an' he told me where she come from, so I knew. He found me a bit funny that afternoon. But he don't know who I am, though he used to go to school with me; I'd never tell, not for worlds." She shook her head vehemently. "I don't know why I told you; I'm not meself to-day, and that's a fact." At her half-suspicious, half-appealing look, I said quickly:

"I don't know a soul about here. It's all right."

She sighed. "It was kind of you ; and I feel to want to talk sometimes. Well, after he was gone, I said to myself : ' I'll take a holiday and go an' see my daughter married.' " She laughed—" I never had no pink and white and blue little things myself. That was all done up for me that night I had the moon in me blood. Ah ! my father was a proper hard man. 'Twas bad enough before I had my baby ; but after, when I couldn't get the father to marry me, an' he cut an' run, proper life they led me, him and stepmother. Cry ! Didn' I cry—I was a soft-hearted thing—never went to sleep with me eyes dry—never. 'Tis a cruel thing to make a young girl cry."

I said quietly : " Did you run away then ? "

She nodded. " Bravest thing I ever did. Nearly broke my 'eart to leave my baby ; but 'twas that or drownin' meself. I was soft then. I went off with a young fellow—bookmaker that used to come over to the sports meetin', wild about me—but he never married me"—again she uttered her hard laugh—" knew a thing worth tu o' that." Lifting her hand towards the burning furze, she added : " I used to come up here an' help 'em light that when I was a little girl." And suddenly she began to cry. It was not so painful and alarming as her first distress, for it seemed natural now.

At the side of the cart-track by the gate was an old boot thrown away, and it served me for something to keep my eyes engaged. The dilapidated black object among the stones and wild plants on that day of strange mixed beauty was as incongruous as this unhappy woman herself revisiting her youth. And there shot into my mind a vision of this spot as it might have been that summer night when she had " the moon in her

blood"—queer phrase—and those two young creatures in the tall soft fern, in the warmth and the darkened loneliness, had yielded to the impulse in their blood. A brisk fluttering of snowflakes began falling from the sky still blue, drifting away over our heads towards the blood-red flames and smoke. They powdered the woman's hair and shoulders, and with a sob and a laugh she held up her hand, and began catching them as a child might.

"'Tis a funny day for my girl's weddin'," she said. Then with a sort of fierceness added: "She'll never know her mother—she's in luck there, tu!" And, grabbing her feathered hat from the ground, she got up. "I must be gettin' back for my train, else I'll be late for an appointment."

When she had put her hat on, rubbed her face, dusted and smoothed her dress, she stood looking at the burning furze. Restored to her town plumage, to her wonted bravado, she was more than ever like that old discarded boot, incongruous.

"I'm a fool ever to have come," she said; "only upset me—and you don't want no more upsettin' than you get, that's certain. Good-bye, and thank you for the drink—it lusened my tongue praaper, didn't it?" She gave me a look—not as a professional—but a human, puzzled look. "I told you my baby was a laughin' little thing. I'm glad she's still like that. I'm glad I've seen her." Her lips quivered for a second, then, with a faked jauntiness, she nodded. "So long!" and passed through the gate down into the lane.

I sat there in the snow and sunlight some minutes after she was gone. Then, getting up, I went and stood by the burning furze. The blowing flames and

the blue smoke were alive and beautiful ; but behind them they were leaving blackened skeleton twigs.

‘ Yes,’ I thought, ‘ but in a week or two the little green grass-shoots will be pushing up underneath into the sun. So the world goes ! Out of destruction ! It’s a strange thing ! ’

1916.

